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The Shadow-Beast: The Influence of Critical Consciousness on Resilience Narratives of Latinx/a/o College Students

Norma Lopez

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THE SHADOW-BEAST: THE INFLUENCE OF CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS ON RESILIENCE NARRATIVES OF LATINX/A/O COLLEGE STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

NORMA LÓPEZ

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2020
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thought by the time I arrived here I would say a perfunctory thank you and be done with it, but this feels more significant than I imagined it would. More than that, all of my years working in student affairs have taught me that the most rewarding part of any interaction with other people has always been when and if they feel I made a difference in their life. The only way to know that is to openly acknowledge it. So, this is my acknowledgement of all the people who made this possible. If it takes a village to raise children and it takes a village to do a PhD, then I have a lot of villages to acknowledge and thank.

None of this would be possible without the love and support of my family. Daniel, Xavier, and Carolina, I cannot thank you enough for the daily motivation and inspiration. You cheered me on when I was too tired to cheer myself on and stepped up when it was needed. Xavier (14), you made me laugh when you questioned my sanity in going back to school, but I hope you have learned from watching your mama struggle through the hard times that nothing comes easy. There is no such thing as smart and dumb, there is only hard work. And it pays off. Carolina (11), I hope I have indeed inspired your own quest for knowledge. You have said you want to pursue a PhD when you grow up and that would be great, but anything you do with the passion and curiosity you have would be worthwhile. Just give yourself the grace to stumble on this journey. Nobody gets it right/perfect the first time. Daniel, when I started this PhD I felt subsumed by my role as wife and mother, which I acknowledge was partly of my own making. I needed more than a hobby to get myself out of that funk. I was looking for a way to find myself
again and you never doubted that I could and should do this. I have grown as my own person while still remaining deeply connected to you. This was our dream for our marriage and this part of the journey has strengthened and reinforced that. Love you all to the furthest solar system and back.

I would not be here without my first family. Para mi mama y papa, los quiero y aprecio muchisimo. Gracias por sus sacrificios y todo lo han hecho por mi. Las noches largas haciendo tarea, cuando les dije que no tenia, y ustedes nunca dudaron en mi capacidad! Como tuvieron tanta fe una niña que no queria hacer tarea? You have taught me the most valuable lessons in life. To my sisters and brother, Gudelia, Griselda, Laura, and Joey, we have all walked away with different perspectives and approaches to life despite being raised under the same roof. I have learned so much from watching how differently you all are using the same life lessons I draw upon. Your grit inspires me and your convictions challenge me to always reflect on my own. Mami would be proud.

I remember the moment I met or heard of every person on my committee and the awe I felt about their expertise and experience. I cannot thank them enough for feedback that improved my writing and research, for permission to take interpretive leaps, for their affirmation and support, and for openly accepting my vulnerability. But I will try. I was told prior to starting the program that I would work as Dr. Demetri Morgan’s research assistant. Being the serial stalker that I am, I Googled him and my initial reaction was that he is the same age as my baby brother. You may be able to guess the tone of that thought. Then I took a closer look and was impressed by his research and research productivity. I knew I had a lot to learn from him and said exactly that in one of our very first meetings. He has patiently explained the world of academia to me, been a role model for what a mentor, adviser, and teacher should be, affirmed and advocated for
my progress, provided the tissues during the really dark times, and provided kind and thoughtful feedback. I have grown as a scholar because of you and that is invaluable, for sure, but I have also grown as person through the reflection that you have prompted me to do. I will say more, Dr. Morgan, about a lot of things. Thanks to you.

The first time I heard of Dra. Aurora Chang was when separately two people asked if I had already talked to her about my research. I had not but by the second time I thought it had to be a sign or something. I met with her and I still share advice she gave me that day about writing and feedback. She used the analogy of putting writing on a train, whether it feels finished or not, because it comes back to you with useful information. I had struggled so much with feedback and hearing this was the beginning of reframing the way that I thought about it. It did not change overnight but it started the change I can now fully see. I am excited to put my writing on the train now, rather than dreading it, it does come back with useful information that improves it and I am forever grateful for that. More significantly, you said it several times at my proposal defense and hearing it really brought home the idea of making interpretive leaps. Thank you for giving me that permission.

I walked into Dr. Leanne Kalleeeyn’s mixed method class in my second year in the program and felt I was destined to write a mixed methods dissertation. Actually, I immediately started making plans for this. Leanne was supportive and helpful as I navigated the world of methodology and specifically mixed methods trying to make sense of it while also figuring out how the puzzle pieces fit together. I wrote a pilot study based on mixed methods that I was proud of and it helped move the research along. With this evolution came the need to develop a new set of research questions for the actual dissertation. I went back to discuss with Leanne and remember sharing my questions. Her response was that both my questions were qualitative. I
thought she was speaking a foreign language that I did not understand because this was not clear to me. We looked at the questions again and in the process of that discussion I had an epiphany, I could see how they were qualitative questions and no matter what I changed I kept asking qualitative questions. I literally thought I might cry and you calmly said, “You are right where you should be,” which turned off the waterworks with lightening speed. Thank you for walking with me on my mixed methods journey only to end up in a qualitative study that has been a joy to write. And thank you for making me feel like I was not behind in this process.

I was sitting in Internship class as Demetri’s TA when he asked if I had read any of Dr. Ebelia Hernández’s work. I had actually read quite a bit about identity development for curriculum class and had come across her work. Demetri then recommended an article that he thought had methodological similarities to my research. In fact, when I read this article, I was immediately fascinated by the similarities I saw as well. What settled the matter of asking her to be a reader on my committee conclusively was how generous she was with her time and intellectual energy in discussing my ideas. Your feedback of my proposal, to align LatCrit throughout my research, was like coming home. Weaving it throughout this dissertation brought so much joy and the added benefit of realizing how your research on identity development emerged as an integral part of critically conscious resilience has been personally gratifying.

In every participant I interviewed, I saw a little of myself, but I also saw each as their own person who, although might share some similarities with me, was not at all like me. Their honesty and vulnerability made this research possible. Their cuentos, consejos, and testimonios are a treasure to me and I hope they will help shed light on how students like them and me have come to be resilient and thrive.
Where would I be without three groups of women, who both inspired my academic journey and provided precious parenting advice or help.

My academic sisters, Destiny and Michelle, thank you for the inspiration you brought into my life while on this journey. There is very little you don’t know about me after all the struggle we have faced together. But here’s a nugget. When I met you, I was intimidated by you both. It didn’t take long to see your warm and supportive nature. Don’t get me wrong, I am still impressed by you but your drive and determination now help fuel my own. Our weekly texts have moved the needle on my research at every turn. I knew I could do this because you BELIEVED in me!

Oak Park and Hyde Park mom friends—Sue, Anjali, Mindy, Sandy, Maria, Rebecca, Leslie, Jenny. In raising my children, I have been fortunate to twice find communities of moms who have been understanding, sympathetic, and always willing to lend a helping hand. First, my UChicago resident head family, Jenny, Maria, Rebecca, and Leslie. I vividly recall my first meetings with each of you. They were all marked by the feeling that I was being welcomed into a community. Whether it was in the advising office, the dining hall, or a dorm, I walked away with the sense that we were in this together. It’s still sad that we don’t live together on the UChicago compound but I have the best memories of that time and so do my children. We did a lot of childrearing while discussing all of our concerns about them as well as wondering out loud how our careers were evolving as we got deeper into parenting roles. I love and cherish those discussions and recognize how they contributed to this journey that I have embarked on.

Since moving to Oak Park, I have been ever so fortunate to have lightning strike again. Sue, you may have given me stank eye when I met you at kindergarten drop off but I’m glad you warmed up to me eventually. You and Anjali were my therapists the first few years of this
program. The drive home with Anjali deserved to be clocked as work time! And all the lunches and drinks with Sue, Mindy, and Sandi were enough to keep me going in the toughest weeks. More than that I knew I could count on you to keep an eye on my kids in a pinch and that peace of mind is priceless.

There is a group of women who have inspired and encouraged me to take on this or any journey with a strong belief in myself, with critical hope, and always centering social justice. I know all of you because of our connection to Williams College. I have known you all between 16 and 25 years! Although Williams was not an easy place for me, I have been forever grateful to the college for bringing you all into my life. Listed in the order I met you, with some being too close to call, Linda, Tanya, Tess, Charlotte, Teresa, Leonora, Demisha, Jenise, Merida. You are phenomenal women who have transformed my life with your presence. I admire your strength, fierceness, and warmth. How is it possible you are all of those things?!

Last but not least, thanks to editor extraordinaire, Amy Gralewski!
In loving memory of my mother, Irma López León.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this LatCrit narrative study was to explore how Latinx/a/o students who are first-generation to college make meaning of their resilience in relation to the development of their critical consciousness. The research questions that guided this study were: How do first-generation to college Latinx/a/o students make meaning of their ability to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity; in other words, how have they constructed their resilience narrative? How does critical consciousness, or understanding their social identity within the context of social, political, and economic forms of oppression, influence their resilience narrative, if at all? Data were collected from the narrative interviews of Latinx/a/o college students using a three-dimensional narrative approach. However, adjustments were made to incorporate a critical race and LatCrit theory framework. Students were therefore asked, via a three-pronged approach, to share a cuento/story, consejo/advice, and testimonio/testimony regarding their awareness of systems of oppression and how they have maintained their resilience. The research uncovered a complex process of critically conscious resilience involving an identity development practice that moves students through meaning making of dissonant external experiences to an internal formula that promotes their community cultural wealth and other asset-based habits.
CHAPTER 1

CONSEJO: RESILIENCE

I have a story to tell that I have never told anyone except my mother. My father may have been hanging around in the background, but he was the never the parent who helped with emotional issues. He was the problem-solver of tangible dilemmas. As my mother passed away 10 years ago, I have realized no one else knows this story. It is in large part because of a sense of shame that I have never shared this information. I love a good story, one with a message, but for many years this one did not seem to have one. The story was one of failure. Now I see it is indeed a story about failure but also of the varied paths you can take after failure. Josselson (2011) wrote that “narrative is conceived as a multiplicity of ‘I’ positions where each I is an author with its own story to tell in relation to other ‘I’s” (p. 227). My story of failure was constructed by a 17-year-old “I” and was impossible to deconstruct and reconstruct despite many years between that “I” and my current “I.” In the last 2.5 years, that reconstruction has taken shape along with the development of my dissertation.

The story begins in the fall of 1991. I was a first-year student at a small, selective, liberal arts college in Western Massachusetts, in a picturesque, bucolic, New England town, surrounded by purple mountains and meandering cows. Honestly, I think the word bucolic may have been born there. To my young, impressionable eyes, it was heaven. However, within a couple of months, the rose-colored glasses were shed and the reality of my situation hit me. The difference between this town and the bustling sights and sounds of my hometown of Chicago turned out to
be astronomical. I detested the bland food, I never heard anyone speak Spanish, and I was asked if I was an affirmative action admit or if my parents would arrange my marriage. I was literally numb with disbelief over how two places and the people in them could be so different.

My academic struggles were more severe. I was struggling and had no one to turn to for advice. My adviser, an older woman in the chemistry department, seemed to agree that the academic strain was too much for me and attempted to dissuade me from pursuing a biology major and medical school. I should have been able to turn to her for help, but I never felt she believed in me enough to trust her with my fears and hopes. I was enrolled in general chemistry, calculus, English, and a Spanish literature class. These courses seemed separate from what I saw as my personal experience, and though my calculus professor, a thoughtful woman with a Texas twang, was forever offering math help, which I gladly took her up on, I never mentioned more than homesickness to her. By the time I received a warning that I was failing chemistry, I was overwhelmed with indecision about who to turn to for help. I failed the class and never said a word to anyone.

I dropped all my science and math classes and decided to pursue a history major. That summer I went home and confessed this failure to my mother while staying up late one night. I told her I could take a summer class to make up the credit. She agreed to pay for the class on the condition that I would never get so far gone in a class to fail it; she impressed upon me the need to ask for help. When I told her I wanted to give up and come home, my dad yelled from another room that he would buy me a used car if I did come home. My mom looked me square in the eyes and said, “Absolutely not, you are NOT coming back because this is something you can and will do.” Though she said she could not offer tangible resources, her belief in me urged me
forward in college and beyond. She never gave advice in the ways you would expect, such as by saying “you should do this or that.” She demanded that you do this or that or figure out a better alternative than what she could suggest.

In the wake of my mother’s death, I struggled to find a new source of resilience and often felt I had lost control of my professional life. During her illness, I became a mother for the first time and had my second child a few months after my mother’s death, none of which helped in navigating my career. I made decisions that prioritized my family, and not necessarily my career. I resisted challenging positions, sometimes attributing the decision to work–life balance, which was certainly a legitimate issue but there was also fear. Applying to doctoral programs was the first time in a long time I pushed myself and it brought back memories of that struggling college student. This time I did not have my mother’s pep talks, but I had constructed my own internal lecture about pushing through adversity to be resilient. The lecture was created by the college experiences I have described, often taking on my mother’s voice saying, in her defiant, lilting speech, something that roughly translates to “oh, we shall see” (“como que no? ya veremos”).

When someone lacked faith in my ability, I became more resistant to giving up and this always seemed to be the insinuation in my mother’s lectures, that “there is a rebel in me—the Shadow-Beast. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind . . . at the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet” (Anzaldúa, 2004, p. 38).

My resilience narrative has changed over time. It started out as a resistance to giving up, and truth be told I still have occasional bouts of “como que no,” but there is more to it now. I have had many experiences since the start of college that have added to this narrative, which I will explore on a personal level throughout this dissertation. This is a highly personal inquiry for
me, but also one I have considered as a student affairs professional working with students who felt, much like I did, that their struggle was too difficult to overcome. In realizing I had developed this internal lecture for myself, I understood it had been there since college, I just had not tested it in a long time. The person who first facilitated its development was gone and I lost sight of her words. This realization compelled me to consider the construct of resilience, my own and that of the students I advised, from a different perspective, one in which resilience might not resemble a normative definition, but that nonetheless exists and functions similarly, still allowing individuals to “thrive in the face of adversity” (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p. 76).

**Definition of Key Terms**

At the outset, I should define the terms I use throughout this dissertation. This will ensure clarity as the terms defined below can have various meanings within numerous contexts.

**Critical Consciousness**

Stanton-Salazar (2011) interpreted Freire’s notion of critical consciousness “as the ability to perceive and interrogate the social, political, and economic forms of oppression that shape one’s life and to take collective action against such elements of society (or social structure)” (pp. 1089-1090). I have additionally employed Hernández’s (2012) definition of the political consciousness process, whereby an “individual gains an increasingly complex understanding of politics, how one’s identities influence life experiences, and how one’s awareness of politics and identity influence actions taken to challenge social norms by participating in activism” (p. 682), to operationalize the term for my research.
First-Generation to College

First-generation to college students come “from families where neither parent had more than a high school education” (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004, p. 249). In participant recruitment communications, I expanded on this concept as I felt students might have been confused if they had other family members attend college, such as siblings, or if their parents began but did not complete college. In both cases, students would be identified as first-generation to college.

Latinx/a/o

I grew up knowing that Spanish words have a gender binary construction. Many nouns have a male and female version, and Latina/o is no different. Even inanimate objects such as chairs, any Latin root language enthusiast knows, might be feminine or masculine. When speaking of siblings, having even one male sibling would automatically change the word sibling from female to male. Therefore, my three sisters and I became hermanos when my youngest brother was born. I saw this change in gendered words as an insidious way of reminding women and girls of their place. I came of age in a time when a/o was added to most words rather than automatically making the words masculine, and that felt empowering. For this reason, I resisted the term Latinx, which “is a more inclusive term for people who do not identify within the binary and/or who are LGBTQIA” and are of Latin-American descent (Sérráno, 2018, p. 94). The term Latinx has also been critiqued for “imperializing language,” or making it more American (Sérráno, 2018). All of the terms I have described are still fervently debated, but I made the decision to use Latinx/a/o as it is inclusive while also recognizing the importance of preserving ties to the Spanish language.
Significance of Study

Examining the resilience process from a critical lens is important to me on a personal and professional level but is also significant in light of the population shift of incoming college students. In particular, the Latinx/a/o population no represents a substantial percentage of today’s college-aged students and, consequently, will make up one-fourth of high school graduates by 2023 (McGee, 2015). Students with minoritized identities also face the most significant disadvantages in attaining a college degree (Price & Wohlford, 2005). For example, Latinx/a/o students obtain high school degrees and entry into postsecondary institutions at rates lower than White and Black students (Kurlaender & Flores-Montgomery, 2005). Additionally, when they do enter college, their completion rates are similarly lower than those of their White and Black counterparts (Kurlaender & Flores-Montgomery, 2005). The already lower access rates should generate greater concern over completion rates and beg the question as to whether colleges and universities are prepared to support students with minoritized identities, and Latinx/a/o students as the fastest growing population in particular (Price & Wohlford, 2005).

The data described above are often investigated from the perspective of college access or retention and completion, as well as from a deficit-based lens. In other words, with a focus on the lack of accomplishment. Yet, rates of completion are made up of individuals who are struggling to navigate college, like I did, and who are finding their resilience within family and community in ways that are unique to them. It is important to understand this struggle on an individual level, specifically how it is experienced by the Latinx/a/o population and how they overcome this adversity. University administrators and faculty should understand how this population makes meaning of their resilience in order to adequately support students. In other words, understanding
how students develop an ability to overcome obstacles has broader implications for issues of access, retention, and completion.

The significance of this study goes beyond comprehension of these educational issues. The United States has a long history of educational structures and policies mired in race-driven policy (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). This not only translates to racist policy, but also overwhelming notions of meritocracy, which “allows people to believe that all people—no matter what race, class, or gender—get what they deserve based primarily on an individual’s own merit and how hard a person works” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 111). More importantly, this long history demonstrates that so “much remains to be done to ensure equity and participation” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 410).

Research Problem

Resilience has generally been defined as the capacity to overcome obstacles and adapt and grow from experience with these stressors (Connor & Davidson, 2003). However, the implicit understanding appears to be that people should understand the process of building resilience and develop it on their own. Additionally, Connor and Davidson’s (2003) research and similar research cannot tell us much about the process by which resilience is developed. Resilience researchers have essentially simply defined factors that protect an individual from stressors by providing alternative responses. In Connor and Davidson’s own words, “Assessing the characteristics of resilience does not assess the resiliency process or provide information about the theory of resilience” (p. 81). Although they did acknowledge that “resilience is a multidimensional characteristic that varies with context, time, age, gender, and cultural origin, as well as within an individual subjected to different life circumstances” (Connor & Davidson,
2003, p. 76), there has been little diversity in the populations studied and no examination of participants’ context.

Recent educational researchers have attempted to gain a new understanding of what factors can shape the formation of resilience or disrupt its development (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013). Yet, much of the focus has continued to be on identifying protective factors, at times different than what the psychological literature has recognized, but nonetheless factors that capture only one moment in time. Nevertheless, the research focus has been on youth with minoritized identities and their ability to consider their positionality in their resilience (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013; Morgan Consoli, Llamas, & Consoli, 2016; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Clauss-Ehlers (2008) referred to this awareness as “insight timing,” which she defined as the developmental time period, by school type (middle, high, college) rather than age, when a participant became aware of the adversities he or she faced. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) identified social capital and critical consciousness as crucial aspects of resilience, specifically connecting awareness of adversity to inadequate access to social networks, which should therefore activate social network building within schools.

Yet, none of these qualitative, contextual studies, nor the quantitative research, have included attempts to understand the process of becoming resilient. Although Stanton-Salazar (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000) and Clauss-Ehlers (2008) more precisely asserted that an awareness of oppression related to identity triggers an attempt to access resources as a precursor to resilience, this has either not been empirically researched or quantitative findings have revealed no relationship between insight timing and resilience.
Researching this concept empirically is not about finding a truth or a single reality (Tracy, 2010). First and foremost, it is about illuminating meaning; in other words, understanding “how human beings construct and attach meanings to their experiences” (Patton, 2015, p. 13). To do this, I chose narrative inquiry as a research method to capture individuals’ stories about how they made meaning of their experience with resilience as well as the context that shaped the obstacles they faced. Theory must be paired with comprehensive, systematic investigations to achieve these goals.

**Purpose of the Study and Research questions**

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore how Latinx/a/o students who are first-generation to college make meaning of their resilience in relation to the development of their critical consciousness. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do first-generation to college Latinx/a/o students make meaning of their ability to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity; in other words, how have they constructed their resilience narrative?
2. How does critical consciousness, or understanding their social identity within the context of social, political, and economic forms of oppression, influence their resilience narrative, if at all?

**Preview of Literature**

The next chapter begins with a rationalization for using critical race theory (CRT) as the appropriate theoretical framework to challenge the way resilience has been conceptualized. Resilience has in large part been categorized as an innate trait that perpetuates the belief in a meritocratic society that rewards people who are resilient (Harper et al., 2009). Employing CRT enabled me to place the experiences of Latinx/a/o students at the center of the study and to
explicitly investigate the ways in which racism and oppression have molded the obstacles these students face (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Furthermore, I intended to ascertain how an anti-deficit approach, a framework that has emerged from CRT, to understanding resilience in Latinx/a/o students is achievable (Pérez, García-Louis, Arámbula Ballysingh, & Martinez, 2018).

I then delve into how resilience has been explored both in the field of psychology and in education, as well as how the combination of these disciplines facilitates a more contextual interpretation of resilience with a focus on the gaps a CRT perspective highlights. The gaps highlighted include a varied set of resilience factors identified within the educational resilience literature that point to differences in resilience factors for students with minoritized identities (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013). These factors are closely tied to socially constructed power structures that influence the types of obstacles students with minoritized identities face, as well as how awareness (insight and critical consciousness) of these power structures might affect resilience responses (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). This awareness can be the catalyst for students with minoritized identities to seek help for situations they know they cannot overcome alone (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). This is the most detailed explanation in the literature of what the process of building resilience might look like, though as stated previously, this idea has not been empirically researched. The process itself is the second gap identified within the resilience literature; in particular, quantitative researchers have stated that “assessing characteristics of resilience does not assess the resilience process or provide information about the theory of resilience” (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p. 81).
Finally, I explore how resilience is connected to the social identities of students. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) stated that an understanding of how systems (e.g., schools) are socially constructed and inherently unfair can facilitate “mobility across multiple and often conflictive borders without sacrificing psychological well-being” (p. 252). Similarly, Torres’s (2003) research on ethnic identity development of Latino college students revealed that understanding context influences self-perceptions. Additionally, in an ethnic identity longitudinal study, Torres and Hernández (2007) found that when Latino/a college students were able to move between their culture of origin and the majority culture without internal conflict (i.e., managing external perceptions without feeling cultural dissonance), they achieved an internal formula of self-identity. Hernández (2012) continued this inquiry to better understand the development of a political consciousness among Mexican American women, stating:

This developmental process incorporates the development of social knowledge, which includes an understanding of political issues and power and oppression (cognitive dimension); the extent to which advocacy for Latinos is an internalized value (the intrapersonal dimension); and the ability to understand the needs of members, allies, and opponents as well as to take into account context in developing political strategies (interpersonal dimension). (p. 697)

I used this strand of literature to assist in recognizing the various stages of identity development within the larger context of identifying a complex, critical consciousness among the students who participated in this research.

**Overview of Methodology**

It is imperative to reiterate that this was a critical qualitative study and there were implications for how the methodology was operationalized. Critical race and Latino critical (LatCrit) theory, a subset of CRT, shaped the way protocols were structured. Within CRT, race and racism are viewed as ordinary and a part of everyday life (Delgado & Stefanić, 2001). This
certainly shaped the questions I asked of participants and required that those questions reflected a query into how individuals made meaning of their social identity and context, specifically as it related to their racialized environment (Hernández, 2016).

My positionality and disclosure of my paradigms in this chapter revealed a social constructionist approach to this inquiry. To be clear, social constructionism is distinguished from constructivism by delineating “the hold our culture has on us; it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!)” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). I acknowledge the contradictions potentially produced by employing a critical lens with social constructionism because it is possible that even a person with a minoritized social identity will “buy into and even tell majoritarian stories,” or a story “that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming their social locations as natural or normative points of reference” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). However, these stories are just as crucial to understanding a person’s resilience narrative as they may clarify aspects of the relationship between resilience and critical consciousness. Although I planned to use intensity sampling to select participants who had arrived at an internal formula of identity that recognized racism and oppression in their lives, I also recognized that a participant may have still been reconciling those external perceptions.

Both social constructionism and CRT’s experiential knowledge tenet positioned this study as a narrative inquiry. To tell the narratives of Latinx/a/o first-generation to college students and how they made meaning of their resilience attended to the CRT tenet of naming racism as ordinary and “valorizing individual’s experiences” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 67). Additionally, much of the resilience literature (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Clauss-Ehlers, 2008;
Connor & Davidson, 2003) contains a focus on protective factors that contribute to resilience and it is clear that this does not inform theory or an understanding of the process. Narrative inquiry is used to collect accounts from participants that may not be told chronologically, but restorying, or “the process of reorganizing the stories into some type of framework,” can allow for an articulation of multiple moments in time (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 72). One such way to reorganize is chronologically restructuring in collaboration with the participants, by ordering events in a sequence, or providing “a causal link among ideas” (Creswell, 2007, p. 56).

Operating from a constructionist design, and guided by CRT, I was able to center racism and oppression in exploring Latinx/a/o first-generation to college students’ experiences, challenge the hegemonic ideology that asserts that colleges (and relevant student experiences) are a color-blind meritocracy, center on the narratives of marginalized students, commit to a social justice agenda, and include an interdisciplinary approach (Yosso, 2005).

**Researcher Assumptions**

Inescapably, my assumptions, beliefs, and biases shaped the very foundation of this dissertation. My personal narrative in this chapter introduced the topic of resilience because it is through my own struggle and recognition of my resilience that I have come to question the extant research. My awareness of power and oppression began to shape a sense of resilience that allowed me to make mistakes or fail and get back up again. I came to believe that racism is ordinary and ubiquitous (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). It shapes the ways we see ourselves and the systems within which we live (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). This awareness began with the recognition of the great disparity in the educational system that my family relied upon to prepare me for college. It continued with an understanding that I had allowed that systemic oppression to
influence my perceptions of my capabilities. I used this new-found consciousness to cease blaming myself and resist the urge to give up when facing challenging situations. As Stanton-Salazar (2011) and Clauss-Ehlers (2008) suggested, this insight gave me permission to seek support more readily and to continue undertaking challenging work.

I chose resilience as the topic of my study because I grappled with these questions for so long. I chose the authors listed in this dissertation because their work resonated with my experience. My paradigms led me to CRT and narrative inquiry. The processes of thinking and knowing that are fundamental to who I am have guided me to straddle the “value-mediated findings” of CRT with the “created findings” of social constructionism (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 110). I share this not to call into question the credibility of my study, but instead as part of the self-reflexivity and self-awareness needed to do the opposite. Reflexivity and awareness bring “honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). I hoped to make clear my point of view, presence, and influence in this research and to distinguish them clearly from those of the participants in the study (Tracy, 2010).

In examining these distinct sets of ideas, I define a new term I believe will unfold in this research: critically conscious resilience. I define this term as the ability to overcome and grow from obstacles as a result of an awareness of disparity tied to oppressive systems as well as an interrogation of those systems as normative. This recognition leads students with minoritized identities to seek help from their social networks or to create new networks to overcome challenges. Critical consciousness allows them to reject notions of meritocracy, which would have them believe in innate talent, skills, or abilities, such as resilience. Rejecting traditional beliefs about resilience as an innate ability would allow minoritized students to accept support,
but understanding disparities would also make visible the support from which non-minoritized students often benefit.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Race Theory and LatCrit

Critical race theorists argue that disparities exist because racism exists (Harper et al.,
2009). To understand disparity necessitates investigating through a critical lens. The crux of the
research questions in this study, therefore, centers on how a minoritized identity, and the
accompanying inequity, shapes resilience in Latinx/a/o students. Much of the psychological
research on resilience was not conceived centering the identity of the person being surveyed
(Connor & Davidson, 2003). Yet, Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) posited that resilience is
intrinsically tied to the identities of students, which, in turn, determines the social capital they
have to navigate their educational experience.

Yosso (2005) argued that the assumption “that People of Color ‘lack’ the social capital
and cultural capital required for social mobility,” including attaining a college degree, negates
the “community cultural wealth” they do possess (p. 70). Instead, reconstructing capital in a CRT
framework, Yosso argued that in centering the voices of individuals with minoritized identities,
the deficit conception of capital is challenged to present an “alternative concept called
community cultural wealth” (p. 70). By altering the lens through which any educational dilemma
is viewed, one can uncover an asset-based approach that leads to a more nuanced comprehension
(Harper, 2010). By altering the lens through which we examine resilience, we may arrive at new
questions and alternative understandings.
In this chapter, I will review and interpret the history and tenets of CRT and discuss an anti-deficit approach to understanding resilience (Harper, 2010; Pérez et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005). This is followed by synopsis of psychological resilience research that is recognized as psychometrically sound, but that contains gaps that are identified and elaborated upon. I will also examine the educational resilience literature, which, unlike the psychological literature, takes context into account but also exhibits tensions. Given claims by educational resilience researchers that identity influences resilience, I also explore ethnic identity development literature. I begin by sharing my experiential knowledge to tell my story.

**Testimonio: Critical Consciousness**

It took me at least a full year to understand how class participation worked in college. At times I was overwhelmed by the sheer amount of required readings and the fact that they were hard to complete or difficult to retain. Other times I was intimidated by other students’ ability to not only recall the readings but to connect them to other texts, some even from other courses. I cannot say what class it was or when it happened, but I remember finally having an epiphany, realizing students were often regurgitating information or simply rewording it as questions. I had sat silently for that first year feeling inadequate and this epiphany gave me an understanding of the differences in our academic preparation. I stopped thinking of myself as deficient when I heard other students talk about their high school experiences and instead began questioning my classmates about these experiences. I wanted to connect how their experiences contributed to their facility with both the academic work and the social navigation of college. Rather than be intimidated, I began to see how they had started ahead of me through no fault of my own, but because of social class, family or generational wealth, and access to academic resources. The
obstacles associated with racism, classism, and xenophobia accounted for many of the obstacles I faced, and identifying them, hard as it felt at the time, was pretty easy in comparison to identifying my own internal resources to overcome these obstacles as well as how I positioned my identity in this process.

This meaning making process was what enabled me to persevere despite feeling deficient and attributing that deficiency to my identity. The process of making meaning of how power structures influenced the obstacles I faced also shaped how I perceived my identity. I did indeed drop a pre-medical focus to become a history major, but I had to choose a specialization and I chose to focus on immigration to the United States so I could better understand the social structures that shaped my own life. I became increasingly involved in the Latinx/a/o organization on campus, Vista, eventually becoming a co-leader. Ultimately, as was common on more than a few college campuses in the 1990s (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), I turned to activism to express my need for a more robust Latinx/a/o curriculum, mentors who might demonstrate a positive ethnic identity representation, and less cultural dissonance while living on campus.

In the spring of 1993, a core group of Vista (the Latinx/a/o student organization) students met on multiple occasions on our own, with administrators, and with faculty to first request these identity-affirming resources. However, we were aware that other students had engaged in similar conversations in years past to no avail, so within months we moved to a more radical approach. We began a 3.5-day hunger strike that would officially lead to the administration conceding to our demands, and 11 years later would formally establish a Latinx/a/o Studies program at the college. May of 2019 marked the 15th anniversary of the program. I have often thought of the start of this hunger strike as a turning point for my critical consciousness as well as my
resilience. I vividly recall saying I wanted change that would create a self-affirming space for students like me, but not necessarily for me. Whereas the previous summer I was ready to transfer after experiencing failure, this semester, when a faculty member stood in front of colleagues and students alike and boldly told us to go home if we were so dissatisfied, I was ready to let the shadow-beast “kick out with both feet,” but this time it went beyond being resistant. This time I felt it was unjust for the college to aggressively recruit us to a predominantly White campus only for us to feel marginalized by every aspect of the experience. I strongly understood the issue as one of social justice and I was determined to leave with a diploma in hand.

I share this story for multiple reasons, not the least of which is the importance and legitimacy of my voice, a tenet of CRT, as a first-generation to college Latina (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). By drawing on my oral history, I participate in counterstorytelling about what resilience does and does not look like (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). It may not check the psychology-based literature boxes (i.e., may seem maladaptive), but it is a real experience and thus valid. This testimonio also foregrounds my epistemology in this research, which is grounded in my own experience, as is the case for other researchers, whether consciously or subconsciously (Tacaks, 2003). It makes clear my positionality from the start, which should not be seen as a deficit according to Tacaks (2003), but instead as an essential first step in my interpretation of resilience. It means I question my understanding of the world and seek to find new understandings.

Additionally, my personal story demonstrates the equal complexity of a minoritized individual’s environmental stressors and the arduous process required to be resilient. It should
also highlight that I was able to analyze the situation critically, and many others like it, to seek help in finding the appropriate resolutions and access my community cultural wealth to ward off feelings of inferiority and build the self-esteem needed to be resilient. Although I had not been exposed to CRT then, the way I operationalized resilience was based on these tenets.

**Origins and History of Critical Race Theory**

Angela Harris wrote the forward to Delgado and Stefanic’s (2001) CRT primer in which she related her profound need to address inequity in her legal studies but did not discover the language to deliver her from this need until 1989. It was then that she attended the first CRT workshop and met law professor, Derrick Bell, who is considered “the movement’s intellectual father figure,” along with other legal and CRT scholars (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 5). This theory, however, has deeper roots than that and has been connected to critical legal studies and radical feminism, as well as American radical activists such as Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, and Cesar Chavez and movements such as the Black Power and Chicano Movements (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

Although CRT has roots in legal scholarly writing, it has been and continues to be interdisciplinary in its development. It has been described as an intellectual space that attempts to explicate the role of race and racism, initially in the U.S. legal system but also in society at large, as well as challenging this form of oppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). One legal example is Harris’s (1993) summary of the racialization of laws and the legal construction of Whiteness, where skin color afforded some rights (i.e., to freedom and property) by law but not others, and eventually evolved into what is now known as White privilege. Understanding the legal history of Whiteness highlights the ubiquitous and pervasive nature of
this privilege and of racism. This perspective on race in U.S. society is often included as the first tenet of CRT, which I review in the next section.

**Latinx/a/o Critical Theory**

Subtheories of CRT include Latina/a/o critical (LatCrit) and queer critical theories, among other racial and ethnic groups who research with a critical lens. “LatCrit is not incompatible or competitive with CRT” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 312), but instead is complementary to CRT by more deliberately focusing on issues of immigration, ethnicity, language, phenotype, culture, and others. LatCrit shares many of the same principles but differs in that it is “concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 311). Furthermore, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) took the activist element a step further by conceptualizing *transformational resistance* as “resistance among Students of Color that is political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible” (p. 320).

**Tenets of Critical Race Theory and LatCrit**

The tenets of CRT and LatCrit are not strictly defined, but there is consensus on at least seven beliefs. These beliefs constitute the basis for the anti-deficit framework, but more than that, when applied to my research questions, can provide an innovative and socially just understanding of what constitutes resilience for Latinx/a/o students.

**Racism is ordinary.** It was W.E.B. DuBois (1994) who said, “The problem of the Twentieth century is the problem of the color-line” (p. v). He went on to describe the opportunities that were theirs (i.e., Whites) but not his, and described the veil of double-consciousness as “the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of
measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (DuBois, 1994, p. 3). Said another way, he defined racism as the subjugation of one socially constructed race over another and its effect on self-perceptions. He described his interviews with African American farmers who were attempting to build their lives despite this contempt and lack of opportunity but concluded that “once in debt, it is no easy matter for a whole race to emerge” (DuBois, 1994, p. 91).

More recently, Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) described the changing legal landscape of racism. They described their early experience with violent racism that led to the civil rights movement, as well as their eventual involvement in litigating hate speech cases. They described words that wound, assault, and threaten. Despite the changes brought on by the civil rights movement, racism continues to exist in different forms, and these experiences left emotional scars. Over time, this kind of overt racism has evolved into an even more subtle form of racism. Color-blind racism is discussed in the section below, but microaggressions are described as another subtle form of racism that also wounds those from minoritized communities. “Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) identified three main types of microaggressions and indicated they “cast doubt on students’ academic merits and capabilities, demean their ethnic identity, and dismiss their cultural knowledge” (p. 667). These microaggressions are invisible and difficult to discern but ubiquitous and insidious in everyday life and can accumulate over a lifetime to affect health, well-being, and morale (Yosso et al.,
A common microaggression that is Latinx/a/o specific is when someone is told he or she speaks excellent English. This framing might be seen as a potential compliment, but it is actually casting doubt on the individual’s ability through an assumption about language.

**Challenge to dominant ideology.** “CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Yosso, 2005, p. 73). The claim of objectivity is simply meant to conceal the reality of power and privilege and protect the self-interests of the dominant group in society (Yosso, 2005). Color blindness refers to color-blind racism, which Bonilla-Silva (2014) argued has replaced overt racism in several ways, from “not seeing race” to believing all people have equal opportunity and simply get what they work for; in other words, “color-blind racism otherizes softly” (p. 3).

Harris (1993) enumerated the cases that have contributed to the creation of White privilege or Whiteness as property, as well as to an ideology of meritocracy. Though not a tangible item that can be owned, Whiteness has been upheld by the courts, for those who possess and can prove it, in allowing ownership of property and rights and even freedom (Harris, 1993). Beginning with the concept that all slaves were African American, even if not all African Americans were slaves, Harris pointed out that by the 1600s slavery was synonymous with being Black and freedom with being White. She ended with a thorough analysis of affirmative action cases and the connotation that affirmative action represents an unfair and unearned seat for a person of color that is taken away from a White student. This view reflects the sentiment that affirmative action hurts current White students because they neither created racism nor do they benefit from it, but the implication is also present that they are more deserving (Harris, 1993).
Affirmative action is intolerable to dominant society because people believe racism is no longer a problem and everyone can and should earn their achievements. Harris added her definition of color-blind racism, stating, “Colorblindness is a form of race subordination in that it denies the historical context of white domination and Black subordination” (p. 1768). The denial of historical oppression is the essence of White privilege and meritocracy.

**The centrality of experiential knowledge.** The experiential knowledge principle centers the voice or lived experiences of people with marginalized identities (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Because racism “is a normal part of American life, often lacking the ability to be distinctively recognized,” then CRT requires the experiential knowledge of people living this racism to be recognized as legitimate and crucial to its elimination (Harper et al., 2009, p. 390). In LatCrit, this knowledge is also known as testimonios, cuentos, or consejos (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). However, it is important to note that the emphasis is on counterstories in which the purpose is to challenge or displace “preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 42).

Indeed, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) used counterstorytelling to examine student resistance in the 1968 East Los Angeles school walkouts and the 1993 UCLA student strike for Chicana and Chicano Studies. More specifically, they emphasized that counterstorytelling in CRT and LatCrit is not simply about telling a story but about expressing resistance to the dominant ideology. The students in both of these examples of resistance shared stories not of them being “acted on by structures,” but instead about how these “individuals negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own from these interactions” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 315). As I have stated in the previous and subsequent
chapters, it is important to acknowledge this agency to act upon systems of power, but it is equally important to understand how people construct resilience narratives without acting upon those structures.

**Testimonios.** Testimonios are used to convey a critical reflection of an individual’s experiences within the context of social, political, and economic realities. They have been understood as a framework, a method, and methodology (Huber, 2009). Testimonios were first used by Latin American scholars to communicate the struggles “of people who have experienced persecution by governments and other socio-political forces in Latin American countries” (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012, p. 364). Huber (2009) defined testimonios as “a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (p. 644). In other words, testimonios are people’s statements of their reflection of a particular self-discovery as influenced by their critical consciousness, as well as an empowering tool to transform these systems.

**Cuentos.** Cuentos are stories but have an additional implied meaning. They are often retold in families as a way to transmit “collective experiences and community memory” (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 624). Delgado Bernal (2001) called these pedagogies of the home and likened them to the concept of funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). The importance of these stories cannot be overstated. They are an important way to pass on ancestral knowledge about every aspect of life, but Delgado Bernal emphasized that most importantly they are used to reveal crucial aspects of surviving challenging situations.
**Consejos.** Consejos literally translates to advice. In LatCrit, it is considered a cultural practice that serves as a way for family to demonstrate support and encouragement for each other (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). “Family conversations transmit people’s voices and open a window into the family’s perceived sense of power in their daily life when dealing with the educational system” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994, p. 298). Consejos also indicate there is intellectual capital that originates in the family structure that “counters school hegemony” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994, p. 298).

**Intersectionality.** Intersectionality maintains that “no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 9). Yet, it goes beyond the awareness of multiple identities and considers how these multiple identities interact with and influence each other. Crenshaw (1991) considered how women of color are failed by resources that neglect to take into account their race and class in providing rape crisis services. Counselors often report that they spend time handling problems other than the rape itself that relate to issues of race or class.

The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women. (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252)

She illustrated, through domestic and sexual violence, how the experiences of women of color are not wholly portrayed or addressed by considering race or gender separately (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality is critical in understanding the resilience of minoritized students because it establishes the precise situation for optimal coping responses (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Optimal coping refers to a person who is struggling with multiple obstacles in life, each related to different aspects of his or her social identity, and choosing to engage with one mentally,
spiritually, and physically in an attempt to be resilient but not the other. An example would be a woman who is undocumented and is being sexually harassed at work. She may not engage with the harassment because of her documentation status. She may see it as optimal to remain quiet so as not to draw attention to herself because the consequences of revealing her documented status may be more dire than enduring harassment.

**Interest-convergence.** Harper et al. (2009) positioned interest-convergence as a way to make progress by recognizing when there is overlap in the interests of those who benefit from the dominant social structure (i.e., White elites) and those who are oppressed by the same dominant social structures (i.e., individuals with minoritized identities). They provided an historical analysis of access and equity policies in education that have been motivated by the convergence of interests rather than an interest in genuine equity. They went further back than the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, but this is the court case that is often used as a primary example of this CRT premise. Bell (1980) argued convincingly and introduced the notion of interest-convergence by citing previous litigation against segregation brought before the Supreme Court for 100 years prior to the Brown case. However, it was not until “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality . . . converged with the interest of whites” that schools were deemed unequal and segregation legally abandoned (Bell, 1980, p. 523). The interests of Whites included obtaining international credibility after World War II, as well as segregation being viewed “as a barrier to further industrialization in the South” (Bell, 1980, p. 525).

**Commitment to social justice.** CRT varies from other academic disciplines in that it includes an activist element. “It not only tries to understand our social situations but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but
to transform it for the better” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 3). Based on this understanding of CRT, scholars have called for transformational education that acknowledges systemic oppression as part of its social justice tenet.

**Interdisciplinarity.** Though not as commonly listed, interdisciplinarity is of particular interest to me in that it was made clear by Ungar (2011) in relation to resilience that an individual’s cognitive and social contexts are crucial in understanding resilience. Ungar clearly stated that both psychology and sociology are necessary in light of the complexity of resilience. Similarly, critical race theorists have argued that the historical and contemporary contexts are crucial to analyzing race and racism as well as other disciplines, for example, legal studies for reasons already given (Yosso, 2005). In particular, in the field of education, CRT “challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses” (Yosso, 2005, p. 74).

Moreover, application to other fields is essential in that CRT scholars interrogate potentially undisputed practices that are sustaining hegemonic systems. This is especially necessary in the field of psychology where constructs such as resilience are considered inherent and individuals lacking these traits are reproached. It perpetuates a notion of meritocracy in that people can only rely on their own ability to get ahead, and if they fail, it is simply their fault and not a systemic failure related to the subjugation of a minoritized racial group. CRT would center the experiences of Latinx/a/o students in the interpretation of resilience, as well the ways in which racism shapes this construct. Interdisciplinarity then requires an examination of both non-identity focused resilience and traditional conceptions of capital. Furthermore, using a critical
approach demands moving beyond merely analyzing resilience and into approaches that can generate a socially just framework. This approach begins with an anti-deficit method.

**Anti-Deficit Framework**

Harper (2010) created an anti-deficit achievement framework based on the tenets of CRT for research on students of color in the STEM fields. He was motivated to do so because many studies in this area contained a focus on students who left STEM and their reasons for leaving. Rather than investigating from a deficit perspective, or what caused their attrition from STEM programs, Harper focused on understanding how students who were retained “managed to acquire various forms of capital that they did not possess upon entry to their respective colleges and universities” (p. 66) and succeed. He did this by using the National Black Male College Achievement Study data and then customized them to apply to other minoritized groups. He explored how students navigated racism or culturally unresponsive universities, as well as how they grappled with identity tensions. These tensions are further explored in upcoming sections, as well as probing the question of acquiring resilience.

Some examples of anti-deficit framing of research questions begin with established theories that have been previously employed to uncover deficits. This reframing involves considering the assets students bring with them in an attempt to understand how they thrived. One example pertains to cultural and social capital, but rather than focusing on what students lack in this area, Harper (2010) highlighted the capital they do possess and how they can use this capital in ways that will achieve the same results as their White peers. Another example involves using stereotype threat theory by reframing the entire theory. Rather than focusing on how stereotypes negatively affect student performance, the question becomes what strategies students
do “employ to resist internalization of discouraging misconceptions about members of their racial groups and how they manage to respond positively to stereotypes they encounter on campus” (Harper, 2010, p. 69). Although I do not agree, he even critiqued CRT as too attentive to minoritized student underachievement and appeared to advocate for research solely focused on the experiential knowledge of these communities.

Pérez et al. (2018) based their anti-deficit achievement framework on Harper’s (2010) model but altered it to apply it to Latinx/a/o students. One adjustment is the consideration that Latinx/a/o students are “multiracial, multiethnic, with transnational and pan ethnic histories and cultures” (Pérez et al., 2018, p. 124); in other words, their identities are intersectional. They also contended that context matters and there are differential qualities to the ways in which Latinx/a/os can navigate campus climates based on their multiple identities. They further considered how familial background might affect achievement, as well as how the incongruence between home and college life might need to be negotiated. The reframing remained the same as Harper’s (2010) model by asking how these elements are aiding, rather than hindering, the success of Latinx/a/o students.

The guiding principles of CRT are essential in using a “race-based epistemology,” as articulated by Harper et al. (2009), “because it provides a lens through which to question, critique, and challenge the manner and methods in which race, white supremacy, supposed meritocracy, and racist ideology have shaped and undermined policy efforts” (p. 390). Although Harper et al. were particularly focused on policymaking in higher education and its effects on a different minoritized population (i.e., African Americans), there are parallels that can be drawn to resilience research. Employing CRT, both as the lens to examine the following resilience
literature and as it is incorporated to the methodology of this research, will reveal the extent that dominant ideology influences how resilience is understood, as well as how individuals are supported in their resilience development.

**Resilience**

Much of today’s psychological research has been used in popular culture, literature, and journalism. Tough’s (2012) book on grit, curiosity, and character, Duckworth and Quinn’s (2009) research on grit, and Dweck’s (2006) work on growth mindset are all at our fingertips. Having been a student affairs professional for over 20 years, I can attest to the fact that this was what my colleagues were reading. Peer-reviewed journal articles did not make it to their desktops, but the *New York Times* and *Huffington Post* summaries of those books did. The Ted Talks and, for some, all their non-peer-reviewed books, are informing some student affairs professionals of how to support students, and in doing so assuming they are using “the tools of science” (Tough, 2012, p. xxiv). These tools of science, in the case of Tough’s (2012) book, are essentially traits or protective factors that have been identified by numerous resilience researchers (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Rutter, 1985; Wagnild & Young, 1993). These were, for example, identified by Tough (2012) as the ability to see failure as a learning experience and persevere despite this setback, a construct that was also the focus of Dweck’s (2000, 2006) research. Tough (2012) further argued that dysfunction at home is a bigger problem than the solutions at school and that home life is a sensitive issue to broach. Yet, his examples of students who exhibit perseverance, grit, and character came out of those same dysfunctional homes. How were they able to overcome challenges and be resilient? There is more to this. Yes, resilience scales tell us whether a person is resilient, but they do not tell us what made that person resilient.
I also read these articles and texts and had, early on, bought into the ideas without question. I can recall asking a student, as an assistant dean of students, what he would do if he were not allowed to stay after being asked to take a leave for failure to meet academic standards. This protocol was intentional and required for every student who petitioned to remain enrolled. Furthermore, the dean explicitly told those on the Committee on Academic Standing that if students did not have a plan they could not stay. This line of questioning, the dean of the college said, demonstrated whether a student put his or her “best effort no matter what” or was “not easily discouraged by failure” (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p.78). Connor and Davidson (2003) developed resilience scales based on decades of resilience literature that have been proven to be psychometrically sound and, although their work has not reached the masses in the same way, their foundation in psychological research means the ideas are not that dissimilar from those found in other psychology research that is reaching the masses.

Moreover, the sentiments expressed by this dean were almost identical to the resilience questions formulated by psychologists studying resilience. Unfortunately, skewed selections of studies are reaching student affairs professionals, and the longer I was in higher education, the more I began to question the ideas presented as grounded in research. This sequence of events, and my own experiences, are how I came to study resilience.

The focus in this section is exclusively on the resilience research, which is divided into three distinct sections. The first section covers the psychological resilience literature. It is essential to understand the evolution of resilience research for two reasons. One reason is that because it is deeply rooted in psychological literature, there are multiple connections to other psychological constructs that are staunchly accepted (Rutter, 1985). Dweck (2006) explained a
growth mindset as struggling, making mistakes, and even failing as a necessity to grow and learn. Though “not easily being discouraged by failure” was among the resilience questions used by Connor and Davidson (2003) and undoubtedly evokes a growth mindset, these are traits that are not innate but are learned, according to Dweck (2006). Again, declaring the importance of growth mindset but saying very little about the process of learning it. Another reason to understand the evolution is that there is enough evidence that resilience can successfully be measured, which is extremely helpful. This literature, therefore, does tell us a lot about whether a person is resilient or not. What needs to be uncovered is what these scales reveal about the process of building resilience and about how its development process varies from person to person based on their lived experiences.

In the second section I examine the educational resilience literature, which has contained a focus on how identity might shape resilience, specifically in youth with minoritized identities. I divide and classify various factors that may contribute to or detract from resilience. These factors are all focused on the impact an individual’s identity may have on both the quantity and quality of stressors, as well as how an individual’s identity influences the resources available to them to overcome stressors. These factors include optimal responses to stressors, which may be maladaptive responses but might also safeguard a person from the most severe of multiple obstacles. The final factor considered is whether the awareness of an individual’s disadvantaged social status influences resilience. Some scholars (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000) contend that awareness of this disadvantage makes students more aware of their need and more willing to seek help.
In the third section I address the overlap and tensions between the two literature strains with a focus on the importance of producing a more complex perspective of resilience. Specifically, I outline the aspects of each strain that contribute to the complexity of resilience. Psychological literature lends a vital lens in its ability to measure the construct but falls short in its ability to explicate how context affects resilience. Although the education resilience literature provides a contextual perspective, neither strain supplies much information about the process of building resilience. This section also supports the importance of the college experience in building resilience. As the focus of this paper was on resilience in college students, the change presented by attending college offers an opportunity to mediate a toxic environment if the institutional agents provide support and guidance on these campuses. Finally, this section highlights some contradictions between the two literature strains that need to be further examined.

**Psychological Resilience Research**

Psychological resilience literature dates back to the 1970s and, early on, resilience was described as a way to buffer “from psychotic disorders” (Wagnild & Young, 1993, p. 166). Essentially, the literature contained descriptors of the type of protective factors needed to overcome obstacles and not develop psychiatric conditions (Rutter, 1985). Eventually, this resulted in scales being produced with the specific intent of measuring resilience, or more specifically stated, measuring the protective factors that help an individual be resilient. “Protective factors refer to influences that modify, ameliorate, or alter a person’s response to some environmental hazard that predisposes to a maladaptive outcome” (Rutter, 1985, p. 600). These protective factors do not have to be positive experiences, as they can be quite challenging
but facing them results in a “steeling effect” or a toughening of individuals (Rutter, 1985). Said another way, resilience essentially reflects the factors that protect an individual by providing alternative responses.

Rutter (1985) elaborated explicitly on these protective factors and listed them as a sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy, as well as social problem-solving approaches and the ability to deal with change and adaptation. He also included stable relationships, a sense of humor, an appropriate amount of control and structure, and even emotional distancing “from an unalterably bad situation, from which you cannot escape” (Rutter, 1985, p. 607). Rutter acknowledged that though there was more information about the protective factors that aid in making individuals resilient, there was inadequate “understanding of how this development takes place” (p. 608).

Wagnild and Young (1993) went on to use much of this early research on protective factors in creating their Resilience Scales (RS). They asserted that resilience is often defined through the various indicators of protective factors but is rarely measured. The five factors they grouped were equanimity, perseverance, self-reliance, meaningfulness, and existential aloneness. They defined equanimity, like the definition of the word, as “take what comes” while “moderating extreme responses to adversity” (Wagnild & Young, 1993, p. 167). The next three elements also fit their definitions, and the researchers described existential aloneness as “the realization that each person’s life path is unique” (Wagnild & Young, 1993, p. 168). Highlighting three aspects of this research is essential. They, like others, based their study on Rutter’s (1985) protective factors, had results that were psychometrically validated, and used a population that was at least 98% Caucasian as well as predominantly elderly, female, and
educated, which means their results were likely not generalizable to a broader population. They successfully measured resilience but did so on a specific group so results could not be applied to other populations and did not reveal much about the process.

The Connor and Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) was also psychometrically validated and widely used in the field of psychology but was also not created taking into account the identity of the person surveyed (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Connor & Davidson, 2003). Connor and Davidson (2003) did survey substantial populations that included more variety in age, gender, and dispositions (from the general population to PTSD patients). The CD-RISC is similarly grounded in decades worth of research, including the work of Rutter (1985) and Wagnild and Young (1993), and the goal was to create scales that would be widely used in the field of psychiatry and research. Both the Connor and Davidson (2003) and Wagnild and Young (1993) scales have indeed been used in research (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007; Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Madewell & Ponce-Garcia, 2016; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013).

However, Connor and Davidson’s (2003) scale has been identified as more “useful than the RS-25 [Wagnild and Young scales] because it has clinical criteria for identifying individuals with lower versus higher overall resilience” (Madewell & Ponce-Garcia, 2016, p. 250). This effectively indicates the CD-RISC is more sensitive to variations of resilience. Additionally, the CD-RISC scales have since been used by Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007) to conduct confirmatory factor analysis using a large, and somewhat diverse, college population. Campbell-Sills and Stein also found that some of the 25-item scale items originally developed by Connor and Davidson (2003) “actually were measuring the same latent construct” (p. 1026) and reduced the survey to a 10-item survey that was just as predictive as the 25-item scale. The 10-item scale
retained items that “reflect the ability to tolerate experiences such as change, personal problems, illness, pressure, failure, and painful feelings” (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007, p. 1026). This research demonstrated compatibility with a younger and more diverse population but still did not explain, despite their different stressors and resources, how they became resilient. The scales could indicate resilience but not convey much about how an individual becomes resilient.

**Gaps in the research.** Many, if not all, studies repeatedly cite as a limitation the absence of context, whether as specific as assessed risk factors or more broadly as the sociocultural environment (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Madewell & Ponce-Garcia, 2016; Rutter, 1985). Furthermore, researchers allude to or directly state that the process of building resilience, or protective factors, is unknown (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Rutter, 1985). Connor and Davidson (2003) explicitly stated that aside from not measuring the process of building resilience, their scales may be measuring resilience as a “determinant of response or an effect of exposure to stress” (p. 81). Said another way, the directional factors of resilience were not considered, and it is unknown whether the participants were made resilient by facing the stressor or were already resilient. Again, this refocuses the question of how individuals acquire and embody resilience factors.

As Spina (1998) articulated in her book review of *Stress, Risk, and Resilience in Children and Adolescents: Process, Mechanisms, and Interventions*, much of the research is “still rather decontextualized” and “embodies and promotes a certain scientific worldview or ideology that is frequently incongruous with the authors’ emphasis on complexity and sociocultural factors” (p. 238). She further stated that a considerable amount of “mental health’ is defined by one’s alignment with hegemonic ideals and the dominant culture” (Spina, 1998, p. 237). In other
words, a person’s ability to be resilient is only as good as his or her ability to navigate social norms in this country. Indeed, Clauss-Ehlers (2008) and others specifically sought to understand how sociocultural factors affect resilience by creating culturally sensitive measures of resilience. The next section provides a context for how the educational resilience literature challenges a decontextualized notion of resilience by foregrounding identity in the research.

**Educational Resilience Research**

The educational resilience literature contains explorations of how identity shapes resilience, as well as the dissimilarity of the stressors and quantity of stressors students with minoritized identities face. It, importantly, invokes the question of how a minoritized identity and the inequity that accompanies it shape the process of building resilience. To a certain extent, researchers have attempted to find values and coping mechanisms that are distinctive to students with minoritized identities. Some studies are narrower in their scope, such as including just Mexican American students, whereas others have a broader scope and include students who self-identify as Latinx/a/o as well as African American. Given the dearth of research on Latinx/a/o students, I have included some literature that more generally focuses on minoritized identities.

Clauss-Ehlers and colleagues attempted to understand the influences of ethnicity, culture, and gender on the process of resilience in a 2006 study using the CD-RISC. Results showed ethnic identity contributed to greater resilience (Clauss-Ehlers, Yang, & Chen, 2006). Other researchers, identified below, similarly attempted to find culturally specific buffers. In a later study, Clauss-Ehlers and Wibrowski (2007) investigated whether programmatic interventions designed for financially disadvantaged students who were first- or second-generation to attend college might increase students’ resilience. The researchers measured ethnic identity and ethnic
identity interventions and found that there were no significant changes to ethnic identity affirmation but there was an increase in resilience (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007). The authors speculated that this could be related to the cultural and social capital obtained by the students through the programmatic interventions (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007). These researchers were not the only ones to make connections between resilience and capital. What follows is a distillation of protective factors that have been identified within the educational resilience literature as specific to students with minoritized identities.

**Optimal responses.** Clauss-Ehlers (2008) tested several hypotheses using a new culturally focused resilience model, the Cultural Resilience Measure (CRM). She posited that students with minoritized sociocultural identities would experience different stressors and cope in different ways (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). In other words, their identities would present unique challenges but also likely might provide different buffers. The correlation, therefore, between the CRM and CD-RISC would be moderate so as to account for these differences. This theory represented a more complicated and perplexing part of her study. Though the participants did report a considerable number of stressors and did turn to their social networks for coping, the process for managing these stressors included what are considered adaptive (resilient) and maladaptive coping mechanisms (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) provided a shrewd explanation for this in describing optimal responses in resilience, which means responses need to consider context and may involve “tolerating one stressful situation to prevent an even more stressful one” (p. 231). This example presents resilient behavior that has not previously been accounted for by resilience scales.
**Insight/critical consciousness.** Another hypothesis in the Clauss-Ehlers (2008) study, though not significantly correlated with resilience, was noteworthy. She proposed and tested a theory that “respondents who reported developing insight about their adversities earlier in life were expected to demonstrate greater resilience and coping in the CRM than respondents who reported having insight about their difficulties later in life or not at all” (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008, p. 209). Although she did not find a correlation to resilience, the question of insight is an important one to consider and one that appeared in Stanton-Salazar’s 2011 examination of social networks and help-seeking traits in minoritized youth, which he called critical consciousness.

**Capital/resources.** Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) focused on how resilience is intrinsically tied to the identities of the students, which in turn determines the resources or social capital they have to navigate their educational experience. Furthermore, according to Stanton-Salazar and Spina, because students with minoritized social identities are not socialized to have access to the same social networks as White students, the reality of those differences not only has the most substantial impact on their resilience but can lead to “alienation and to behavioral patterns that further compromise their psychological development” (p. 228). In other words, social environments provide some individuals with networks that allow resilient factors to predominate as well as protecting them from psychiatric disorder.

Likewise, Cabrera and Padilla (2004) hypothesized that the Mexican American college students in their study might have found it difficult to maintain optimism in the face of so many environmental obstacles. They cited several barriers that contribute to feelings of marginalization (i.e., quantity and quality of stressors), first with their “border crossing, and it continues today with their perception of racism in their respective communities” (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004, p.
They went on to explain some common difficulties faced by students transitioning to college (e.g., academic struggles) and included additional institutional and social struggles (e.g., racism and xenophobia) the Mexican students in their study encountered in college, which grew the list exponentially (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). Cabrera and Padilla concluded that students are resilient in large part because of their family support, but also cited a lack of capital that is often held by middle-class families as the reason students struggle in overcoming obstacles.

**Culturally specific buffers.** Other studies have similarly revealed the difference in stressors and in coping. Morgan Consoli and Llamas (2013) employed the Wagnild and Young (1993) Resilience Scale to demonstrate that the Mexican American Cultural Values Scale might predict resilience. The researchers found that familism/familismo was the strongest predictor of resilience, which is unsurprising given that previous research has noted stable relationships and other social supports as important in coping. Respect/respeto and religiosity/religiosidad were not notable predictors but were described as significant by respondents in the open-ended questions. The other Mexican American cultural values studied did not correlate with resilience (Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013).

Morgan Consoli et al. (2016) conducted a similar study but added a Thriving Scale to the Wagnild and Young (1993) Resilience Scale and Mexican American Cultural Values Scale. They defined *thriving* as going beyond resilience in that this “‘better off’ phenomenon encompasses gains by the individual following hardship” (Morgan Consoli et al., 2016, p. 50). Although many have defined resilience as facing adversity and returning to a state of normal or baseline development to just overcome the obstacle, Connor and Davidson’s (2003) scales did incorporate how the “disruption represents an opportunity for growth and increased resilience”
Morgan Consoli et al. (2016) found thriving positively correlated with resilience and similarly found resilience and thriving correlated to familism most strongly, as well as to religiosity. The fact that religiosity was not found to be strongly correlated with resilience in their first study, nor in this study, but correlated to thriving might indicate that though religiosity does not benefit the narrower definition of resilience, it might aid in thriving or the broader resilience definition that includes growth from disruption in this population.

Overlap and Tensions

In this section, I consider the extent to which the psychological and educational resilience literature overlap. The similarities between the two strains of literature provide valuable insight on the resilience construct in that they provide a broad understanding of the psychological underpinnings of resilience and its importance, especially to traditionally-aged college students.

Overlap. Madewell and Ponce Garcia (2016), in examining resilience in emerging adulthood, defined as occurring between the ages of 18 and 25, cited the developmental nature of protective factors such as “cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control, and executive functioning capabilities” (p. 250), but also maladaptive behaviors and mental health disorders during this time. In other words, this is a natural time for growth and development. Additionally, and equally important, is the transitional nature of this period, whether it is beginning a college degree or embarking on a career. Researchers on both sides agrees that this time is a crucial developmental period.

The educational research that involves the sociocultural effects on resilience supports that strong connections to one’s culture and family can offer validation and resources to develop greater academic resilience (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). These studies elaborated on the need to
understand the role of mentors, cultural values, role models, sense of community, and external support (i.e., religion), among others (Garza, Reyes, & Trueba, 2004). Psychological research supports that stable relationships, self-esteem (tied to cultural pride), and even religion are crucial to resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

**Tensions.** The tensions are similarly as crucial in that a normative set of resilience factors may not apply equally to all or may impart a narrow understanding of resilience (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000; Ungar, 2011). Furthermore, much of the educational resilience literature alluded to the contextual factors that affect resilience, some referring to them as “risk factors” and others referencing the inequalities attached to social identities, but the current psychological resilience literature has outlined how ecological factors inhibit resilience. Ungar (2011) went so far as to say that “the environment is more critical to child development than a child’s individual traits” (p. 4). Moreover, a “subject-centered approach means that responsibility for resilience is wrongly placed on the victim of toxic environments” (Ungar, 2011, p. 5). Ungar argued that not only is this problematic, it does not allow for an accurate understanding of resilience because of the universal acceptance of the psychological (i.e., individual-centered) definition of resilience. He argued that individuals do not become resilient because of their innate characteristics but instead, they change “as a consequence of what their environment provides” (Ungar, 2011, p. 5). A change of environment is especially relevant to the college experience because though most children’s environments cannot be altered significantly during their childhood, college can, in certain circumstances, offer a natural ecological shift. College does indeed offer an opportunity to mediate a toxic environment if the appropriate support and guidance are available and accessible.
A Critical Lens

The Connor and Davidson (2003) scale includes questions such as “I like challenges” and “Even when things look hopeless, I don’t give up” that are rated on a Likert-type scale, which again emphasizes an individual’s ability to adopt a positive outlook during challenging times. This perspective on optimism and hope is in contrast with identity-focused resilience research which recognizes that for students with minoritized identities, obstacles are potentially a daily occurrence that cannot be avoided (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). Therefore, optimal responses, as Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) pointed out, become necessary and the reason why avoiding some obstacles reserves energy for challenges that produce greater dividends. In most situations, overcoming the hurdles is indeed the goal, but the manner in which this happens can vary significantly according to the identity-focused resilience literature.

Like Clauss-Ehlers (2008), Cabrera and Padilla (2004) used a case study to expose the role of “insight” in the success of two Mexican American Stanford students. They speculated that the students’ success could be attributed to their learning “what the middle class take for granted, that is, that there is a class- and culture bound knowledge that is necessary to succeed in higher education” (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004, p. 168). These ideas are entirely untouched in the psychological literature. Although one could conjecture what is meant by class- and culture-bound knowledge, other research has more clearly defined what this might entail. Stanton-Salazar and Spina’s (2000) work encapsulates the tensions (i.e., context) and similarities (i.e., family support) most succinctly by describing what resilience looks like for individuals with minoritized identities. They also clearly described and labeled this class- and culture-bound knowledge as social capital. A CRT approach might specifically recognize that resilience is
viewed by some as an impartial way to determine a person’s ability to overcome obstacles, rather than a learned response based on the social networks that have surrounded that person his or her whole life.

Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) sought to understand the “differences in the socialization of racial minority youth in contrast to middle-class white children and youth” (p. 228), as well as what conditions might lead to more resilient youth. Their primary focus, aside from unpacking how the resilience psychological research has been rooted in American values of individualism and meritocracy, was to understand the help-seeking and network-building behaviors of students with minoritized identities. The connection between the two, resilience and supportive exchanges, can be best described as a loop whereby help-seeking and network-building exchanges can support psychological well-being, which in turn expands learning and develops resilience. Moreover, they sought “to better articulate how the forces of exclusion and social oppression have become normalized within every institutional structure which minority families and youth must routinely negotiate” (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 228). They specifically named the factors that contribute to resilience in minoritized youth as social capital and oppression.

How Does Identity Development Shape Resilience?

In this final section, I take up the ideas presented in the identity-focused resilience research, coupled with ethnic identity development, to more clearly elaborate on the intersection of the two. I first elaborate on Stanton-Salazar’s (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000) concept of critical consciousness and its impact on resilience, followed by central
themes from the ethnic identity development literature. In this section I also examine how capital is connected to all the other constructs.

According to Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000), identity and social capital influence resilience in a process that involves identifying both the reasons for the lack of access to resources (i.e., oppression related to their social identity) and the ability to develop a network of potential helpers. This social capital is the currency that expedites a minoritized youth’s ability to navigate between two worlds—his or her own and that of the dominant society (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Social networks can inform the individual about resources, both figurative and literal, that can aid in facing and overcoming challenges. Potentially, the stressor itself comes in the shape of just learning the terrain of this dominant society and learning the capital that allows the individual to live in this world (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). However, the crucial aspects that trigger engagement with social networks originate from a critical consciousness by both the student and his or her networks (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000).

Several identity development researchers (Torres, 2003; Torres & Hernández, 2007; Yosso et al., 2009) have examined how societal views of Latinx/a/o people might shape identity development. Results of one study showed students who experienced a racist event “are characterized as being able to understand multiple perspectives that allow them to make deliberate choices about how negative stereotypes will influence their self-perceptions” (Torres & Hernández, 2007, p. 571). Understanding the complexity and multiplicity of identity development, in conjunction with the intricacy of examining outside perceptions of social groups, aids in identifying how students are transformed by developing “skills of critical navigation through multiple worlds” (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 678).
Critical Consciousness

A critical consciousness appears to influence help-seeking traits in that an individual must be able to understand the complexity of hegemonic systems and the additional layers of obstacles this presents, which enables him or her to search for institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Freire (1974/2017) called for a “phenomenon or problem” to be grasped through “their causal and circumstantial correlations” in order to be critical (p. 41). Stanton-Salazar (2011) interpreted Freire’s notion of conscientizacao “as the ability to perceive and interrogate the social, political, and economic forms of oppression that shape one’s life and to take collective action against such elements of society (or social structure)” (pp. 1089-1090). Access to mentors with networks outside of students’ social group or economic class might, for example, afford the students access to networks that their home communities could not. At the very least, mentors could help students understand whom to trust and when to be independent, as well as serve as advocates on their behalf or provide transactional support that merely delivers a specific connection or resource. This raises questions about how students come to understand their needs and access institutional networks, what role their minority status plays in this process, and whether their resilience is tied to variables that are considered adaptive or maladaptive within the psychological research.

Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) discussed resilience through four dimensions, which are essential in understanding the above role of critical consciousness. The first dimension states the importance of participating in multiple networks and being able to transition between different social networks. Knowing how to move within these groups becomes vital as youth transition and are introduced to new networks with different conventions and expectations. They
attributed the ability to navigate these different networks to cultural capital and discussed the ways in which “the successful oriented practices are similarly normative and inadvertently foster unquestioned conformity to the hegemonic model” (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 243). The second dimension is resilience as a developmental process, in that a person learns to use the networks he or she has cultivated and the resources those networks can offer. The third is resilience as the development of “psychological attributes and defenses,” which translates to knowing “whom to trust, whether to be trusting and interdependent and when to be independent” (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 246). The fourth is a positive network orientation, which means people actively work toward creating and maintaining social networks and relationships, use them for additional sources of support, and can cross sociocultural borders to achieve these networks (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000).

However, what requires further exploration is how students develop an understanding of their place in a hegemonic society. Specifically, it is crucial to consider how societal perceptions influence how students develop their own understanding of self, or their identity development.

**Identity Development**

Ethnic identity development literature has a long history, beginning with Phinney’s (1989, 1991) research that was grounded in research in ego and self-esteem while incorporating contextual information about how these concepts interact with race. Torres and colleagues (Torres, 2003; Torres & Hernández, 2007; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009) then used this research to derive a more specific analysis of how Latinx/a/o college students develop identity and what factors contribute to this process. Many of the themes that emerged from both researchers, despite at least a decade’s difference, were tied to perceptions of the individuals by their peers.
and society and how the individuals made meaning of those perceptions. The themes that follow were parsed out by topics that appeared evident in understanding how identity formation might affect the educational experiences of Latinx/a/o students, as well as the converse, how their experiences are influencing their identity formation. Can Latinx/a/o students develop a durable and proud sense of identity given what Anzaldúa (2004) called the “extreme devaluation of [Latinx/a/o cultural values] by the white culture” (p. 44)?

Identity Salience

The priority designated to a group identity is often influenced by the significance of that social group at any given time. This salience often occurs less in monocultural settings. When an individual’s social identity is shared by most individuals in the community, the individual identity will likely prevail. However, when an individual’s social identity is in the minority, as is the case for the more than 50% of Latinx/a/o students attending college, the salience of that social identity might shift (Torres, 2003). Whether students come from a monocultural or diverse home background influences how they will perceive their social location in college. For example, students may have felt comfortable with their social identity at home where they were one of many second- or third-generation Latinx/a/o students and may not have spoken Spanish, but once they found themselves among a higher number of first-generation and native Spanish speaking students, they questioned their belonging in the Latina/o community. Conversely, first-generation students experience greater cultural dissonance, or disagreement between their own cultural and familial expectations and those of peers or professors (Torres & Hernández, 2007).
Self-Perception

Several articles have shown how perceptions of social groups influence identity development (Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Torres, 2003; Torres & Hernández, 2007; Yosso et al., 2009). Specifically, there is much information about how racialized incidents or external/societal views of Latinx/a/o people might shape identity development. For example, in their longitudinal study, Torres and Hernández (2007) found that students moved between stages of identity development. The phases began with “following external formulas” to managing those external factors and using their own “internal formulas.” In developing their identity, experiencing a racist event might promote development and mediation of those external and internal forces by being “able to understand multiple perspectives that allow them to make deliberate choices about how negative stereotypes will influence their self-perceptions” (p. 571).

Encounter/crisis. Related to self-perceptions are encounters, which are mainly a form of transmitting stereotypes or others’ perceptions and potentially creating a new interpretation of identity. In other words, encountering a person or situation that imposes the “negative views of the dominant society, thereby developing a negative identity and self-hatred” (Phinney, 1989, p. 34). In these incidents, individuals are faced with a choice to accept these negative views or to discard them and make meaning of their experiences to create their own identity (Phinney, 1989; Torres & Hernández, 2007).

New environments also create new encounters (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). “Identity is shaped by how one organizes experiences within the environment (context) that revolves around oneself” (Torres et al., 2009, p. 577). This not only reinforces the idea of salience but also illuminates the role new environments can play in identity formation. It means that not only is
college positioned to shape identity, but within that college experience there exist multiple circumstances that could influence this process. For example, different classes, new residential halls, and all the varied co-curricular activities students might engage in are prime examples of all the conditions that might shape identity development.

**Connecting Identity Development to Critical Consciousness**

In their ethnic identity longitudinal study, Torres and Hernández (2007) found that when Latino/a college students were able to move between their culture of origin and the majority culture without internal conflict, in other words managing external perceptions without feeling cultural dissonance, they achieved an internal formula of self-identity. This raises the parallel question that Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) presented, which is the need to take action (i.e., accessing social networks for help) when enlightened about social structures that affect one’s obstacles. As Hernández (2012) stated, “A sense of self (or consciousness)” can illustrate “the interconnectivity of social knowledge, identity, and political engagement” (p. 682). As it did for me, “consciousness necessitates action, such as activism in the form of resistance to social norms” (Hernández, 2012, p. 683). This strand of literature assisted in recognizing the various stages of identity development within the larger context of identifying a complex, critical consciousness in the students who participated in this research. The development of a political consciousness includes “developing social knowledge (cognitive), developing a life calling to advocate for Latinos (intrapersonal), and developing political acuity (interpersonal)” (Hernández, 2012, p. 697).
Forms of Capital

Finally, it is important to take a closer look at the forms of capital to tie the entire literature review together. Capital is very much bound up in identity and has been connected to resilience by Stanton-Salazar (2011) as well as to CRT by Yosso (2005) in creating community cultural wealth, an anti-deficit view of capital held by people with marginalized identities. Bourdieu (1986) warned that capital cannot be perceived as solely economic. Equally relevant to success and profitability are cultural and social capital. Social capital refers to the network or group memberships of an individual, “which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 9). Cultural capital takes three forms: (a) embodied, “dispositions of the mind and body;” (b) “objectified state, in the form of cultural goods;” and (c) “institutionalized state,” in the form of academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 3). Both social and cultural capital can be transformed into economic capital under the right circumstances (Bourdieu, 1986). Though these theories have been critiqued as being deterministic (King, 2000), others have argued there is more complexity involved and that capital is more dynamic than originally thought (Lizardo, 2004). Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011), in particular, agreed that capital attainment looks different but is nonetheless present for youth with minoritized identities.

Bourdieu’s work has become a mainstay in sociological research (Davies & Rizk, 2018; Lizardo, 2004). His theories have generated decades of research and critique (Davies & Rizk, 2018). Bourdieu’s theories have especially strong implications in education as much of the research that has followed correlated capital to educational stratification (Davies & Rizk, 2018; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Higher education has important
consequences on resilience in terms of changing ecological environments. “Higher education, in particular, is a crucial prerequisite to the occupancy of the economy’s most lucrative and influential positions” (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985, p. 1233). In other words, going to college places students in an environment that can alter their ability to become more resilient and, if successful, provides an opportunity for social mobility.

Social Capital

Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011) argued that social and cultural capital work together in dominant society to create normative structures and processes that enable certain individuals to navigate normative systems more easily. He “defines social capital as consisting of resources and key forms of social support embedded in one’s network or associations, and accessible through direct or indirect ties with institutional agents” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1067). This capital functions “as pathways of privilege and power” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 4). Minoritized youth, however, face a different attainment process, one that must account for a racialized society and focus on “social antagonisms and divisions existing in the wider society [which] operate to problematize (if not undermine) minority children’s access to opportunities and resources that are, by and large, taken-for-granted products of middle-class family, community, and school networks” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 3). Institutional agents can empower individuals with minoritized identities by countering “the social structures that would normally exclude these youth (and their familial and peer networks) in the allocation of society’s resources and privileges” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1086).

Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) argued that institutions can play a role in filling the network gap for minoritized youth, and Stanton-Salazar (2011) went into detail regarding how
institutional agents can empower minority students. He defined institutional agents “as an individual who occupies one or more hierarchical position of relatively high-status and authority” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1067). These agents are able to access various networks of their own, via their status and authority, and in turn directly negotiate on behalf of the youth or simply guide them to appropriate resources. Social networks or capital are often supplied, or their acquisition modeled, through familial connections, yet if minoritized youth do not have access to these networks, as described by Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000), then these youth must rely solely on institutional agents to fill in the gap. Institutional agents thus become “empowerment agents,” but it is important to note, that similarly to identity-focused resilience research, Stanton-Salazar (2011) articulated a need for critical consciousness in igniting agency in seeking help and building networks.

**Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital, in its embodied form, which is the focus in this section, has been elaborated upon since its earliest definitions, which viewed “culture as a resource – one that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next” (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 567). It has also been referred to more generically as “cultural traits that are rewarded in fields like education” (Davies & Rizk, 2018, p. 332). Essentially, cultural capital reflects a familiarity and ease with the culture, customs, and behaviors of the “dominant” class (Davies & Rizk, 2018). Cultural capital is also the ways in which people communicate and interact and is subtle and “no doubt the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 6). It cannot go unnoticed that Cabrera and Padilla (2004) similarly referred to resilience as “class and
culture bound knowledge” (p. 168) that is taken for granted by the middle class, in their identity-focused resilience research. This is no doubt the way I understood cultural capital; however, there is no consensus on the specific definition of cultural capital (Davies & Rizk, 2018; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Indeed, several branches have emerged from Bourdieu’s theory that are summarized below.

**DiMaggio branch.** DiMaggio used surveys to measure cultural capital and connect it to educational attainment and marital selection (DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). “He operationalized cultural capital as children’s exposure to cultural forms such as classical music, great works of literature, the arts, galleries, and museums, assuming that such exposure was provided largely by families” (Davies & Rizk, 2018, pp. 338-339). DiMaggio referred to this as “high culture” and the findings in one study did demonstrate a relationship between cultural capital and educational attainment (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). However, there were also some differences in outcomes that emerged in this and other studies that led him to consider a social mobility hypothesis (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). Specifically, “He interpreted this as suggesting that cultural capital was not necessarily the exclusive property of the upper middle classes but was instead a robust resource that could facilitate anyone’s success in education, leading to either socioeconomic mobility or reproduction” (Davies & Rizk, 2018, p. 339).

Davies and Rizk (2018) viewed this as a deviation from Bourdieu’s theory but there is further evidence of capital being non-static, in part because of the changing nature of society but also based on other interpretations of Bourdieu’s work (Lizardo, 2004). DiMaggio’s research gave way to other similar research that demonstrated the “gradual declines of mass participation in high-brow activities” (Davies & Rizk, 2018, p. 341). Other researchers have specifically
examined the relationship of cultural capital and educational attainment at elite, selective institutions (Davies & Rizk, 2018).

**Lareau branch.** Annette Lareau’s application of cultural capital employed qualitative methods to observe how families align their home values and practices with those of their children’s school requirements (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). First, she contended that cultural capital is not solely a reference to “highbrow” cultural activities. Lareau and Weininger (2003) emphasized that cultural capital can be the strategic use of knowledge of systems as well as proficiency with various social interactions; “Put differently, they have different skill levels for managing institutional encounters” (p. 597).

An example from Lareau and Weininger’s (2003) study featured an African American middle-class family. The mother in this example was interviewed and relayed situations in which she intervened and advocated for her two daughters, whether for gaining entrance into a gifted program despite lower test scores or expressing dissatisfaction with treatment by teachers toward her daughters. Not only were there discussions in the home about these interventions, but in one case where the mother could not intervene, she walked her daughter through how to manage an interaction with institutional agents, including practicing her responses at home. “In doing so, they transmitted to them a sense of entitlement and propensity to intervene as well as a set of techniques for doing so” (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 593). Lareau and Weininger also interviewed a working-class African American family dealing with similar school situations with their children and found they did not intervene or coach their children in the same way.

Current research in this vein has investigated similar parental interventions involving disciplinary actions at school, acquired cultural capital through schools rather than home
socialization, and how children’s temperaments can determine building or depleting cultural capital for themselves (Davies & Rizk, 2018). The latter two strains of literature support DiMaggio’s findings that cultural reproduction might not solely happen at home and can be acquired through other means and contribute to social mobility.

Collins branch. Randall Collins’s contribution to cultural capital focused on interaction rituals between individuals that create group membership through symbols and dispositions, which facilitates interactions within any group (not just high status). “Privilege and power is not simply a result of unequal material and cultural resources. It is a flow of emotional energy across situations that makes some individuals more impressive, more attractive or dominant” (Collins, 2004, p. 13).

This strain of cultural capital is important in that Collins (2004) more fully articulated how these emotionally intense interactions can propel cultural changes, shifting perceptions of prestige. In other words, cultural capital “could be possessed by nondominant groups” (Davies & Rizk, 2018, p. 340). This sets the tone for further research that does not view low-status groups as culturally deficient. It is from this branch that community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) emerged. This anti-deficit capital has been conceived of with various minoritized identities in mind and includes the following:

Aspirational capital: The capacity to maintain hope in life and for the future despite facing conditions that might indicate the unfeasibility of realizing those aspirations.

Linguistic capital: Skills attained in straddling at least two cultures and languages, sometimes at very young ages, because their family’s circumstances require them to become a translator.
**Familial capital:** Represents the connection to family, community, history, and culture. It creates broader connections and can minimize feelings of isolation.

**Social capital:** Not unlike Bourdieu’s theory of social capital, refers to the networks available to these communities and, as Stanton-Salazar (2011) stated, may look different and rely on institutional agents more often but are nonetheless helpful.

**Navigational capital:** People of color have learned that they are often living in racially hostile environments and develop a sense of how to circumvent or navigate these racially charged situations.

**Resistant capital:** Refers to “oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). This capital references Freirean (1974/2017) critical consciousness and the CRT social justice tenet but can also be seen in the texts of radical activists and feminists. The idea of accomplishing something because you are constrained by others, especially when it stems from inequity, was beautifully described by Anzaldúa (2004) as the strength of her rebellion or her “shadow-beast.” “It is the part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts” (Anzaldúa, 2004, p. 38).

These branches contribute to a fuller understanding of how cultural capital is operationalized and reveal the ways in which and reasons why Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) viewed resilience as intrinsically coupled with capital.

**Conclusion**

Freire (1974/2017) believed a critical education could inform the critical and strategic action of oppressed or minoritized peoples; however, it is essential to understand the root causes
of experiences to achieve the actions that permit true engagement in society with all the
privileges allotted to dominant society. These are the underpinnings of a critical consciousness.
He also understood the cognitive and iterative process required for this critical consciousness.

To access help, an individual must understand the nature of his or her own needs
(Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). This might involve first understanding how the need is shaped
by oppression but it could also involve making meaning of the individual’s devalued identity in
society. If building a strong sense of identity does indeed lead to self-esteem and self-confidence
(Phinney, 1989), which according to Rutter (1985) are important in being resilient, then how
students understand their identities within the framework of critical consciousness is crucial to
explore. As Freire (1974/2017) articulated, people are not tied to one response, “they organize
themselves, choose the best response, test themselves, act, and change the very act of
responding. They do all of this consciously, as one uses a tool to deal with a problem” (p. 3).

I set out to explore what resilience looks like and how it is constructed. I have come to
see resilience as a socially constructed. It is cognitive, yes, but it also relies heavily on the social
and cultural capital passed on, often through family, but also through institutional agents if they
are prepared for the task. Minoritized youth may rely on institutional agents to attain access to
social networks, but beyond that they may be depend on them to make meaning of how their
identities are intrinsically tied to their social status and therefore their capital and resilience. The
dependence on institutional agents may be greater for minoritized youth and they may require
support in navigating social structures within college, as well as in developing a critical
consciousness.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I briefly describe the purpose of the study and restate the research questions. I provide a narrative of my positionality and a detailed description of the paradigms from which I operated in this research and then connect them to the rationale for using narrative inquiry. The research design is addressed next, with a focus on participant selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and a study evaluation and ethical considerations.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore how Latinx/a/o students who are the first in their families to attend college make meaning of their resilience in relation to the development of their critical consciousness. The research questions that guided this study were:

(1) How do first-generation to college Latinx/a/o students make meaning of their ability to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity; in other words, how have they constructed their resilience narrative?

(2) How does a critical consciousness, or understanding their social identity within the context of social, political, and economic forms of oppression, influence their resilience narrative, if at all?

Mi Cuento (Positionality)

Early Years: Foundation of Paradigms

My father, Jose López, arrived in Chicago on January 27, 1971. He remembers the date vividly because his young bride, who stayed behind in Chupícuarro, Michoacán, a small fishing
village on the edge of Lake Cuitzeo, gave birth to their first daughter that day. My father was greeted by the cold, windy city with a call from the warmth of his village and family informing him of this occurrence. To date, he starts his immigration story this way. Irma López, his bride, left their hometown 2 years later, leaving behind this daughter to be cared for by both abuelas (grandmothers). She arrived during the winter months of 1973 and before the year was out gave birth to their first U.S. citizen daughter, me. Along with my birth came the birth of their American Dream— their desire to put roots down in this foreign land in the hopes of giving their children a better life.

I do not have recollections of those early years when we lived in a small apartment that we typically did not leave, unless necessary, because of fear about my parents’ undocumented status. I have heard stories about my father’s struggle to get a job after General Motors laid him off from his position as a line worker. Eventually, he would establish himself as a welder with a small company. I also remember my mother telling the story about an immigration raid when she was 9 months pregnant with my younger sister. I was approaching 2 years of age and she refused to run because of her girth and unsteadiness. The immigration officials assumed she was a green card holder or a citizen because she did not run, when she was neither. Some of the earliest memories that are my own are of my parents’ struggle, largely because of their immigration status. For example, soon after they obtained citizenship status they attempted to vote and were turned away from a polling place. I remember them discussing where they should go before leaving and could sense the uncertainty in their voices. Once turned away they did not know how to proceed. I must have been about 10 years old and I remember feeling sad and wondering why they did not know what they should do. Why were they facing so many struggles? These
experiences have unequivocally influenced my ontological perspective in that I believe all structures are dictated by power and privilege. Inequity is a reality that cannot be ignored, as it shapes many people’s experiences, often in negative ways.

**College and Career: Evolution of Paradigms**

A significant aspect of my parents’ dream was for their children to achieve the educational aspirations that were unattainable to them. Neither finished elementary school and they dreamed of us going to college and, once they learned about other options, graduate school. Attending college was not easy for me or my siblings and it became clear that being the first in our family to attend college was a disadvantage as compared to those whose parents had attended. We also lacked the agency we so wanted for our parents to have in voting or looking for work. We encountered challenges, such as microaggressive racism, that were unlike any experience we had in our Mexican American community of Pilsen in Chicago and similarly did not know how to address them.

Yet, despite these difficulties, my parents got us all to and through college. They often said, “We do not know what you need to be successful in college, but we do know that you need to ask for help.” They had learned that a community of family and friends could be strong enough to accomplish anything. Years later, when most of their five children had completed college and some graduate school, my father would turn to my mother and ask, “Did we know what we were doing or did we get lucky?” My mother’s response was, “You may not have known, but I have always known.” I am not sure if it was my youth or poor memory that led me to think they lacked agency, but maturity and unclouded vision clarify to me that they had it in spades and passed it along to us. I viewed the world through a hegemonic lens that allowed me to
focus only on what we lacked and not how we made up for it. I have shared my stories of resilience throughout the first three chapters of this dissertation, but this section should make clear how my interpretation of resilience, my own at least, has been influenced by these experiences.

Moreover, these experiences led me to a career in college access and student affairs; I wanted to share what I knew and help other students like me. However, supporting and advising first-generation to college students and students of color produced a complexity in how I view claims to knowledge. Working with these populations, I was inclined to meet them where they were. When I considered warning them about the challenges they might encounter, I refrained and listened to their stories to gauge where they were in the process of understanding how oppression affected their personal and academic lives. I asked questions that allowed them to come to their own conclusions, sometimes dissimilar from my own, but a starting point to facilitate their own reconciliation about and resilience in their struggles. My positionality has certainly influenced my paradigms and the theoretical framework I chose (i.e., CRT). I elaborate on both in the section below and discuss how I integrate and harmonize both given the possible contradictions.

**Aligning Critical Race Theory and Paradigms**

Given the nature of the Latinx/a/o community as a minoritized population, the focus on a critical consciousness in understanding identity in this context, and my own experiences as previously outlined, I was compelled to use CRT as the framework for this research. The educational resilience literature is unwavering in its recognition that race plays an important role in a student’s ability to be resilient, even going so far as to identify additional protective factors
that are specific to students with minoritized identities and are not identified within the psychological research (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Garza et al., 2004; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Using CRT and LatCrit, as outlined in Chapter 2, placed race and racial structures at the center of understanding resilience.

Based on my epistemology, I resolved to conduct this research with participants’ full engagement and without hierarchy. In granting equal weight to the participants’ experiences I question the power dynamic that academic research creates between researcher and participant, as I believe “social inequality is connected to intellectual inequality” (Winter, 2016, p. 29). Said another way, “All claims to knowledge are inevitably claims to power” (Weinberg, 2008, p. 33). In doing so I also accepted how the participants made meaning of their resilience process on their own terms, which oriented the study to social constructionism.

It is important to pause here to distinguish between constructivism and social constructionism. Social constructionism states that people’s constructed reality can be varied, feel authentic, be influenced by context, and definitely shape perceptions and reasoning. Specifically, in researching a cognitive concept, it is important “to understand how social actors recognize, produce, and reproduce social actions and how they come to share an intersubjective understanding of specific life circumstance” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 37). Constructivism, on the other hand, indicates that each of us makes sense of the world in distinct ways and this, on its own, is a valid construction (Crotty, 1998). Social constructionism, however, distinguishes “the hold our culture has on us; it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). Social constructionism gives weight to how society shapes individuals’ realities, while still validating their authenticity.
Yet, my axiological philosophy is that my perspective and theoretical frameworks should not but may influence the participants and the research. In acknowledging my separateness from the participants, I recognized that my lens could be different and in contrast to that of the research participants. Methodologically, this influenced the study in that it was an interactive process used to identify resilience meaning making and empower minoritized students to voice their narratives. I recognized that using a critical lens with social constructionism created contradictions because it is possible that even a person with a minoritized social identity will “buy into and even tell majoritarian stories;” in other words, a story “that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming there social locations as natural or normative points of reference” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). As outlined in Chapter 2, the primary purpose of the experiential knowledge tenet is to recognize racism and oppression from the perspectives of those most often affected and silenced by these power dynamics, people with minoritized identities. The contradiction exists in that the intention within CRT is to “change power structures,” or to critique and transform, whereas constructionism attempts “to gain increased knowledge regarding . . . study and subjects by interpreting how the subjects perceive and interact within a social context” (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 24). Figure 1 may help demonstrate how the two diverge but also complement each other.
Critical race theory | Social constructionism
---|---
Center the narrative of participants | Yes, but primarily to uncover power structures | YES
Identify power structures (racism, oppression, etc.) | YES | Yes, but primarily to explain the socially constructed reality of participants

Figure 1. Critical race theory and social constructionism.

However, it is important to be aware of normative points of reference as potential coping mechanisms and name them as maladaptive if they are in fact not providing appropriate adjustment to the environment, or as optimal if they are the least harmful of options. Both were just as important to my research and both required the use of and social constructionism to decipher. Furthermore, using CRT can aid in ascertaining structural factors, but identifying interpersonal and intrapersonal influences on a participant’s resilience narrative was best served by social constructionism. Still in arguing these points, I recognized the balance needed so I did not “claim to know how things really are” (Hosking, 2008, p. 672). I was able to offer my own lived experience as part of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and provide contrast to other stories (Patton, 2015).

**Purpose of Narrative Inquiry**

Methodology naturally emerges out of specific disciplines and individual perspective (Lincoln et al., 2018). My paradigms and theoretical frameworks aligned with a qualitative method and specifically one that focused on the stories told by students with minoritized identities. Narrative inquiry emerged from the literature review as well as from the paradigms described above. The literature made clear that a quantitative approach could only measure
factors contributing to resilience in a specific time frame (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Previous studies, both psychological and educational, have revealed important factors to resilience but have not clarified resilience process or theory (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Specifically stating that factors only capture a moment in time, it became clear that using a method that could create a narrative of meaning making that unfolds over time was necessary. Narrative inquiry is used to collect accounts from participants that may not be told chronologically, but in restorying, “the process of reorganizing the stories into some type of framework” can allow for an articulation of multiple moments in time (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 72). Ways to reorganize include chronologically, restructuring through collaboration with the participant, ordering events in a sequence, or providing “a causal link among ideas” (Creswell, 2007, p. 56).

Experiential knowledge is a crucial aspect of CRT and requires centering the voices and stories of minoritized individuals (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The notion of telling our own stories, potentially stories that counter privileging a White experience as normative, can be both empowering to the participant and “challenge the dominant discourse of race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). To tell the narratives of Latinx/a/o first-generation to college students and how they have made meaning of their resilience attended to the CRT tenet of naming racism as ordinary and “valorizing individual’s experiences” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 67). Additionally, in being true to their stories, which was executed through multiple interviews, a journal, and member checks, and inquiring pointedly about racism and oppression, I was creating a social constructionist narrative.

Last, I have come to understand my own life and resilience as a series of stories stitched together, in retrospect, at this later stage in my life. I have looked back on my college experience
and made meaning of particular incidents that shaped how I view my resilience, then and now. Many of these stories happened long enough ago that they have a beginning, a middle, and an end—there is a continuity of experience that is unique to my life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have understood my own world narratively, so it “makes sense to study the world narratively,” in other words, “filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of space and time, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17).

**Research Design**

**Participant Selection**

Inclusion criteria for this study were purposeful and included college students who self-identified as Latinx/a/o and who were the first in their family to attend college. Self-identification could include a person who immigrated or whose ancestors immigrated from any Latin American country. Beyond this, identity identification was superseded by the intensity sampling criteria below. First-generation to college could include anyone who had a sibling, older or younger, or parents who began but never completed college. This was outlined in the recruitment documents. Additionally, participants needed to identify as individuals who had stories to tell about their resilience.

Narrative inquiry research ambiguously identifies the number of participants needed as more than one (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure the depth of inquiry required for analysis, approximately one to three participants would be feasible and was the range found in a number of published narrative inquiry articles (Chan, 2009; Mitton-Kükner,
Nelson, & Desrochers, 2010). However, to ensure depth of experience and comparison capability, seven participants were chosen based on the selection criteria.

**Intensity sampling.** The number of participants was kept low because the goal was to obtain a comprehensive depiction of their life stories. In light of this, it was helpful to employ intensity sampling, which can provide “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely but not extremely” (Patton, 2015, p. 267). To do this, the goal was to identify students who had cultivated a critical or political consciousness regarding their identity. Again, these terms refer to an awareness of how one’s identity and the oppression bound to that identity affect his or her ability to take action (Hernández, 2012; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). In her study, Hernández (2012) identified students whose ideology reflected pride in their ethnic identity and were involved in political action on campus. Yosso et al. (2009) identified academic and social counterspaces as locations that cultivate “students’ sense of home and family, which bolsters their sense of belonging and nurtures resilience” (p. 677). These spaces allow students to acquire cultural knowledge as well as identity self-affirmation, which contributes to their ethnic pride. Often these spaces are negotiated through political action on the part of the students (Hernández, 2012; Yosso et al., 2009). Hence, recruitment of Latinx/a/o students was focused on social and academic spaces on campus similar to those described above: Latinx/a/o organizations and academic units.

**Selection procedures.** I first connected with two institutions and three college access programs where I had connections to the directors of these organizations and academic units (Appendix A). This did not guarantee participants’ interest but did ensure that recruitment documents were disseminated directly to students. I shared a recruitment email for students
(Appendix B) with these directors that included a brief summary of the study and inclusion criteria specific to their identity self-identification, their attentiveness to racism and oppression as obstacles in their lives, and recognition of their resilience story. Students were free to decide whether they fit these criteria.

**Data Collection**

“Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 121). To this end, data were primarily derived from semi-structured interviews. Narrative inquiry, as with other qualitative methods, “yields rich, in-depth details about lived experience” and its intent “is to honor the individual’s life experience” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 139). Data sources for this study consisted of interview transcripts and researcher reflexive journal. Each is elaborated upon below.

**Interviews.** All field texts, as they are referred to by Clandinin and Connolly (2000), including interviews, observations, notes, journals, and other sources, were focused on the telling of participants’ stories. This was guided by the intent to create a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This can be accomplished by focusing on the “personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). However, in order to align this methodology with LatCrit, I ensured each dimension contained a focus on a student’s cuentos, consejos, and testimonios.

Testimonio methodology has a long history as a political approach used in an attempt to communicate the struggle of people of Latin America who have been persecuted by their government (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Huber (2009) defined testimonios as “a verbal journey
of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (p. 644). In other words, testimonios are a person’s statement of his or her reflection of a particular self-discovery.

Similarly, cuentos and consejos have been used as methods to collect stories and advice that are often repeated in families as a way to transmit “collective experiences and community memory” (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 624). Delgado Bernal (2001) called these pedagogies of the home and likened them to the concept of funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). The importance of these stories cannot be overstated. They are an important way to pass on ancestral knowledge about every aspect of life, but Delgado Bernal emphasized that most importantly they are used to reveal crucial aspects of surviving challenging situations. Using these three dimensions allowed for the depth and breadth the three-dimensional narratives I endeavored to accomplish, while maintaining a clear and well-defined connection to the CRT tenets and specifically LatCrit principles.

I conducted one approximately 1-hour semi-structured interview with each participant focusing on each aspect of the LatCrit three-dimensional narrative (Appendix D). Students received an explanation of terms in advance so they could prepare adequately for the interview (Appendix C). They were asked to reflect on their life and the early years through the present, with a specific focus on getting to college and their experience there. They were instructed to consider how systems of power or racism affected the challenges they faced and how they had been resilient in these situations and to choose stories from each of three categories of the LatCrit three-dimensional narrative.
The first category required them to reflect on stories/cuentos told about or by them or their family that influenced this process. These might be stories that were told often or stories that they knew but were not spoken. In the second category they were asked to consider advice/consejos they received about their resilience with regard to their goals for college. This advice did not have to be about specific aspects of their college application. It could be any advice that affected their ability to get to college or in overcoming other challenges that may not seem related to the student. Last, they were asked to share a testimony/testimonio of their resilience while in college or in getting to college and how they observed the emergence of their critical consciousness as well as how that critical consciousness shaped their resilience, if at all. This might be the moment they acknowledged themselves as resilient or as having an awareness of power structures that personally affected them.

**Researcher reflexive journal.** The researcher reflexive journal met two needs (Appendix E). The first was to reflect upon my own predispositions, biases, and blind spots in conducting this research (Patton, 2015). The other was to share further aspects of my resilience narrative. As I have already shared multiple stories of my own that emerged through the writing of this dissertation, in my journal I shared stories that surfaced from the process of interviewing participants as well as documenting my reflection about how I was “experiencing the experience of being in the inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 88). The journal could specifically contain those notions that were in conflict with the participants. This tangible separation allowed me to make the distinction between my own meaning making and that of the participants.
**Data Analysis**

An important distinction to narrative inquiry “is to treat the story as data and the narrative as analysis, which involves interpreting the story, placing it in context, and comparing it with other stories” (Patton, 2015, p. 128). Writing the narrative is how the data are presented and involves the composition and scripting of the story within a specific context and purpose (Patton, 2015).

Although I conducted interviews with a LatCrit three-dimensional approach, this did not guarantee that responses remained exclusively in each category (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It then fell to me within the data analysis process to identify the three-dimensional aspects of interviews. Classifying codes specifically identified each aspect of the three-dimensional narrative: cuentos, consejos, and testimonios. This approach could be considered the categorical approach to analysis (Josselson, 2011), as this coding enabled an analysis and comparison to other narratives by category.

Another approach to analysis was to examine each narrative holistically, which emphasized “how the parts are integrated to create a whole – which is meaning” (Josselson, 2011, p. 226). Though the aim of doing this analysis was coherence between stories about events, people, places, and time through the testimonios, cuentos, and consejos of students, in order to create a whole account from the different pieces, there was the possibility that the theme of the narratives would be incoherence (Chase, 2018). This fragmentation revealed a unique narrative about resilience that should be uncovered.

**Analysis procedures.** To accomplish all of the above, all data were first inventoried and organized (Patton, 2015). I began by doing a categorical organization and analysis of interview
transcripts, and researcher reflective journal. Categories included cuentos (stories), consejos (advice), and testimonios (testimony) as outlined above and focused on identifying patterns, themes, turning points, or epiphanies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because each interview’s focus was on one of the above categories, they were simply coded separately for these themes or epiphanies. Comparisons were then drawn between each type of interview’s themes as well as across different types of interviews.

The transcripts were further coded in NVivo and categorical coding was done line by line. Coding was done in layers, first open coding, focused on deductive analysis, or “coming from other sources such as theory or other prior research” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 249) and then on inductive analysis, or “generating new concepts, explanations, results, and/or theories” (Patton, 2015, p. 54). After developing the list of codes, I used axial coding to find patterns and relationships between codes. This produced themes and subthemes between codes. NVivo allowed for even more connections and patterns to be identified between major themes and types of narratives, for example. Finally, narratives were pieced together holistically based on the categorical, inductive themes, and events described.

Transcripts were saved on a password-protected computer, to which only I had access. Participants chose pseudonyms and all interviews can only be identified by the pseudonyms. A separate record linking the participants with their pseudonyms has been kept on this password-protected computer.

Field notes and observations during data collection were also kept separately from the researcher reflexive journal. The purpose of these field notes was to “document the analytical process- in depth, systematically, and regularly” (Patton, 2015, p. 523). Observations about
participants’ behavior, intonations, inflections, and body language were described here (Daiute, 2014). These observations may be the predecessor to thoughts about emergent ideas, breakthroughs, and preliminary analysis (Patton, 2015). Keeping careful field notes ensured a more thorough account of the stories, as well as pinpointing where emergent analysis began.

**Trustworthiness**

The notion of triangulation, or “locating an unknown point by measuring angles to it from known points,” assumes there is a fixed point at which to arrive (Patton, 2015, p. 652). The goal of this research was to not to “get it right” but instead to get it “differently contoured and nuanced” (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018, p. 818). Validity cannot be arrived at if one believes there is no single truth (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018). Therefore, my aim within this study was not to claim that my interpretations are the only possible ways to understand the data, it was only to assert that it was a feasible understanding of resilience based on the literature review, data gathered, and analysis employed (Chase, 2018). Crystallization, on the other hand, “provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic” (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018, p. 823). My goal therefore was to be systematic, conscientious, and rigorous in the process of collecting and analyzing data in order to enhance credibility that this study is one possible way to understand resilience.

One way to enhance credibility is to draw comparisons between interviews, journal, and field notes. Trustworthiness can be conveyed by analyzing the consistency of participants’ responses to similar questions in person versus in their member reflection or inquiring about inconsistencies between verbal responses and non-verbal responses, in other words conscious or unconscious gestures and movements. The purpose, however, is not to uncover mistakes, but to
indicate a discrepancy and to allow the participant to collaboratively reflect and elaborate on it (Tracy, 2010). By conducting a member reflection, data can be verified, findings and interpretations confirmed, and possible gaps or inconsistencies identified can also be settled (Patton, 2015). Member reflection took place in three parts. In the first, I shared a copy of their interview transcripts to read and provide any modifications they deemed appropriate. In the second, I contacted them after completing the coding and analysis to inquire about any gaps identified or clarifications. In the third, I shared with them the final narrative so they could again offer input.

The researcher reflexive journal also imparted trustworthiness by disclosing my biases and separating my resilience narrative from the participants. Though this reflexive journal communicated the distinction between my story and those of the participants, it also explicitly indicated how my past experiences likely shaped the interpretations I made (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The intent was not to be impartial or detached but to communicate a self-awareness and self-exposure, as well as to hold myself “accountable to the standards of knowing or telling of the people . . . studied” based on the process outlined in this chapter (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 269). This self-awareness and self-exposure also happened externally through conversations with members of my committee regarding all aspects of this research.

**Study Evaluation and Ethical Considerations**

The purpose of narrative inquiry is to tell the lived experiences of people and in doing so to validate their experiences as authentic and meaningful (Creswell & Poth, 2018). CRT similarly values the experiential knowledge of those who have endured oppression (Yosso et al., 2009). Social constructionism more explicitly identifies an experience as unique, while still
influenced by social structures (Crotty, 1998). In evaluating the study, it is essential not to attempt to understand the findings as generalizable given the nature of the paradigms, frameworks, and methodology employed. Most qualitative research is limited in this regard for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that these experiences only account for a small number of possible experiences as well as being unique to the participants. Additionally, there has been little similar research conducted on this topic. However, as further research is conducted, the ability to create a theory of resilience will be expanded.

As much as I considered the data I collected, I thought more about the data I did not collect (Tracy, 2010). I was well aware that what participants did not share with me was just as important as what they did share. I recognized that study participants may have felt unable to share certain aspects of their stories, which would distort or make incoherent their narrative as whole. I used member checks to attempt to address this or at the very least acknowledge the gaps that existed. In the first chapter I shared a story of my own that is difficult to put into words, so much so that I had never said it out loud to anyone but my mother, who has passed away. Therefore, I understood that no living person knows that aspect of my story. It was freeing to write the story, but I struggled to do it. In doing so, I acknowledged the emotional strain required to tell a story of resilience because it is often accompanied by a story of struggle, or what may feel like failure.

This recognition influenced the ethical considerations for the study. Not only did I submit the research to the Loyola University Chicago Institutional Review Board, I was thoughtful about establishing a trusting relationship with participants. This began with transparency in the process. Though there were no foreseeable risks in participating in the study, I was personally
aware of the emotional discomfort associated with telling their resilience stories. Additionally, although there were no direct benefits from participation, the results might provide insight for participants about their own resilience. This was openly shared with participants, as well as being clear that they could, at any point, decide not to respond to questions or withdraw from the study. Finally, I researched counseling information at the two campuses I targeted to have a ready recommendation for participants in the study, should they need it. My first priority was the well-being of the participants.

**Meaning Making Chapters**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Latinx/a/o students who were the first in their families to attend college made meaning of their resilience in relation to the development of their critical consciousness. Beyond that, I also intended for this narrative inquiry to allow for the creation of three-dimensional narratives that incorporated the cuentos, consejos, and testimonios of the research participants into one holistic story. Narrative inquiry involves the recognition that people are ever-evolving, which requires that I narrate that process of change. This necessarily implies that an event is not happening in one moment in time, but over a period of time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is fitting that resilience is also a process of change and must therefore also incorporate development as part of the story. In order to narrate that change, however, it is important to break up the continuous story into smaller actions that can be interpreted as narrative signs. “It is necessary to give a narrative interpretation of that sign before meaning can be attached to it” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31).

People cannot be known by their sometimes disparate collection of actions nor as a sum of those parts; they must be represented as whole and complex beings with internal struggles that
lead them to their next action. Therefore, I first present pieces of each narrative based on interpretations of actions and assignment of meaning in Chapter 4 and then present a holistic narrative of each participant in Chapter 5. Specifically, I explore three meanings in Chapter 4: critical consciousness differentiation; resilience versus thriving; and distinctions among cuentos, consejos, and testimonios. Once action is assigned meaning, the whole can come together with deserving complexity.
CHAPTER 4

MEANINGS – FROM “THIS TOO SHALL PASS” TO “I’M GOING TO MEET YOU THERE”

In this chapter, I present the actions of the participants and designate meaning to each one. It is important to note that similar to themes in other types of qualitative research, meaning is derived from smaller actions that build into broader meaning making. Consequently, each of the meanings below is composed of submeanings, which are really micro-actions assigned meanings, that construct the larger action or meanings. Together these meanings provide an interpretation of this study that tells a story about a critically conscious resilience that not only perceives systems of power, but also interrogates their normatively accepted nature. The combination of perceiving and interrogating is essential to critical consciousness, which, in turn, influences resilience in a way I had not expected. The students who participated in this study were remarkably resilient but struggled instead with thriving, that is until they were ready to question the power structures that shaped their obstacles. When the students were able to make meaning of dissonant experiences around their identities and regard their community cultural wealth as worthy currency in traversing unknown experiences, they took risks, made leaps of faith on their academic merit, and flourished. Their consejos and testimonios clearly propelled
action in terms of interrogating hegemonic power, whereas cuentos were more often used to just perceive these dynamics.

The first meaning demonstrates how the students appeared to understand critical consciousness to a certain extent and they expressed it enthusiastically. For the purpose of their narratives and in relation to their resilience, it seemed to move them toward their goals. However, in examining their narratives through a LatCrit lens, it became apparent that the students were only comprehending a partial definition. The participants acknowledged systems of power but struggled with *challenging* the dominant ideology. Another aspect of critical consciousness was the role of identity development in both the awareness and interrogation of oppressive systems. The next micro-action within the broader umbrella of critical consciousness was the comparisons students made to their peers with regard to financial, social, and cultural capital. Finally, where and how students processed their critical consciousness surfaced as a submeaning within critical consciousness. In assigning meaning to these four micro-actions, I interpreted from the participants’ cuentos, consejos, and testimonios that it was difficult to interrogate systems of power when there was a constant comparison of capital, which, in turn, influenced their identity development that too often focused on these external elements. Moreover, moving beyond just perceiving to interrogating oppressive systems that created the varying forms of capital, as well as identifying and elevating their community cultural wealth, required spaces or places where they could process their understanding of identity and develop their critical consciousness.

The second meaning reflects how students constructed their resilience narratives but felt they fell short of other accomplishments for a variety of reasons. I first briefly explain how the
literature has treated resilience versus thriving and why it matters in these cases. The meanings demonstrated the ways students articulated their arrival at their goal of getting to and graduating from college but their inability to express that they wanted more. I review findings from the narrowing of the CD-RISC scales (Connor & Davidson, 2003) that highlight many of the micro-actions that surfaced in this study, including self-concept, persistence, growth mindset, and adaptation. The meanings that emerged from the students’ actions were based on how their identity development influenced their self-perception based on the external dissonant factors they were facing on a daily basis in college. Furthermore, the students demonstrated they were challenged by a multitude of obstacles and often their ability to persist was based on choosing the optimal response. For some, thriving critically meant looking back on their past resilient experiences and intentionally looking for more unknown and uncomfortable learning environments so their growth, as students and as resilient people, could become exponential. This led some to understand that making new goals and adapting to new situations required that they look back on those resilient moments.

Finally, the third meaning underscores the differences in students recounting their cuentos, consejos, and testimonios by observing how often each of these types of narratives is cross coded with simply perceiving power structures or sharing stories that challenged these systems. The students were more likely to challenge power when sharing their consejos, or advice, which according to the literature is a more active process than sharing a cuento. Testimonios were almost evenly split between perceiving and questioning, which aligned with the definition of bearing witness to a particular situation, in this case their resilience or critical
consciousness, which sometimes was only their perception and not an interrogation of systems of power.

Taken together, the meanings derived from the actions of the students guided me to an understanding of the powerful connection between critical consciousness and resilience. The influence of critical consciousness on resilience and thriving involved recognizing the negative impact of systems of power on students’ lives and then reframing those situations through the lens of their community cultural wealth with the help of institutional agents or spaces that helped them process the complicated nature of systems of power. Those systems of power often go beyond racism and include much more subtle conditions, such as microaggressions or invisible privileges. This gave the students the capacity and confidence in themselves to move into those new and uncomfortable situations, knowing they had overcome similar situations before and they could again.

**Participant Profiles**

Before diving into the meaning categories, I would like to provide a brief introduction of each participant in the study. Though holistic, three-dimensional narratives of each participant are included in the subsequent chapter, I felt it necessary to introduce the reader to the students being interviewed. These brief profiles give a quick overview of the information the students reported to me followed by my initial reaction to them. They help situate who each student was and where they were in their college, critical consciousness, and resilience journey.

Kimberly was concluding her fourth year of college at a small, selective, liberal arts college. She will be graduating as a French major despite having dreamed of majoring in art history and becoming a curator. She grew up in a large urban city with her parents, who are
undocumented, and a brother. Kimberly described a happy childhood, unaware that they did not have much because her parents’ creativity allowed for this blissful ignorance. Her parents made a dollhouse and clothes out of materials to which they had access and Kimberly was content with the creative process of making these things and playing with the products afterward.

I interviewed Kimberly via Skype and she spoke at length about needing to heal largely because she felt a great deal of disappointment in herself and in her college experience. I felt a strong connection to her experience and her pain, having attended a similar institution. Her hurt was palpable and brought me back to the pain of my own college years. Kimberly was wary of making plans beyond graduation for fear of more disappointment but was surprisingly vulnerable and open in her conversation with me.

Nancy was completing her third year of college at a small liberal arts women’s college, which happened to be a 2-hour flight (not car ride) from home. This was not exactly what her single mom wanted for her, but she was also delighted that all three of her kids were attending college. Nancy was majoring in psychology and completing pre-med requirements as well in the hopes of becoming a veterinarian. This course load had been incredibly stressful for her and her mom was concerned about Nancy’s ability to get into a veterinary school with her current GPA.

I met Nancy in a coffee shop near where she grew up in her mother’s childhood home. They moved back to this home so they could care for her ailing grandmother and special needs uncle. Nancy also has a twin sister who had learning disabilities and, as it seemed to be her nature to be considerate and caring, she had taken it upon herself to be her sister’s personal tutor most of their life. They attended the same college where they both felt out of place most of the time but had found a supportive community through a college access program and organizations
on their campus, in particular the first-gen group. Despite sharing the sentiment that she sometimes felt out of place, Nancy was cheerful when speaking about her college and grateful for the opportunity to be there.

Flor was a first-year student at a large state university. She was hoping to major in political science and minor in Spanish or sociology. Flor was the oldest of three sisters and felt a lot of pressure to be a role model for them. Other than the pressure of being the oldest, she said her household was marked by the inclusion of both of her grandmothers. One lived with them year-round and the other one seasonally because she came up from Mexico in the spring or summer. Flor said she was raised in a strict (for safety reasons) and Christian household, which meant being proper, responsible, and always aware of her surroundings.

I spoke to Flor near her childhood home soon after she had returned home from her first year in college. She immediately struck me as cautious, almost distrustful, but soon I realized she was just attentive, prudent (with her words especially), and discreet. It seemed many of the lessons she learned at home were about being careful in the outside world. She had examples. People who commented on her use of Spanish in public spaces was a pet peeve and though she was proud of her language and heritage, she recognized that sometimes it put her at a disadvantage to be vocal about it, especially where conservative faculty were concerned.

Alex was a first-year student at a small, private, Catholic university. He would like to major in economics and neuroscience. Alex moved to the states when he was 6 years old and until that age he lived mostly without his parents in Mexico, in the care of his grandmother and aunt. He did not really see this as a challenge but also did not have early memories of his mother. His parents always had high academic expectations of him and his siblings. Alex had two
younger siblings and an older sister who paved the way for him to attend college. They chose the same university and both had the same scholarship for undocumented students. He did not see his citizenship status as an obstacle in this regard, possibly because he had a roadmap already laid out for him.

Alex asked that we speak on the phone and I could not help but wonder whether his undocumented status influenced this behavior. We did not discuss this specifically, though he did mention several times that he refused to let his citizenship status define him and that he was proud of his identity. He seemed to have an affinity for the ethics and Catholic social teaching courses offered at his university. Alex appeared drawn to stories of immigration and hardships associated with that experience. This made him feel grateful for his situation as well as to conclude that he had a responsibility to do well for that very reason; because he was an immigrant and undocumented, he felt he should serve as a role model for others, as well as help those in need.

Rodolfo had just finished his third year at a medium-sized Catholic university. He began his college career at a large, out-of-state, public university. Upon arrival, he felt an immediate culture shock and did not have a sense of belonging. Rodolfo said he looked around and could not find another person who looked like him. Eventually, he found one other student to whom he felt a connection, who was also Latino and from a nearby suburb, but it was clear by the end of the semester that this was not enough. He was always a happy kid growing up in the outskirts of a large city. His parents pushed him and his older sister to well in school and he had extended family around who did not always value academics but seemed supportive enough. Therefore, the anxiety and sadness he was experiencing took him by surprise.
Rodolfo and I met on Skype for the interview. He was incredibly forthcoming even though not always comfortable with the issue we were discussing. For example, although he did not specifically state that he was anxious, depressed, or sad, he alluded to “mental health” issues and spoke about apprehension and concerns about being on the first campus he chose. It weighed heavily on his mind. Early on he even noted these feelings and promised himself that if things did not change by Thanksgiving he would transfer, which he did, and had a positive experience at his new school. However, the doubt did creep in at times.

Abigail was a third-year student at a small, public, comprehensive state college. She started by stating that she was not even going to go to college. Abigail had applied to a bridge program at a local college, though she soon realized she had no way to pay for the program or for college and decided to find another path. A staff member at the bridge program then began calling her regularly to convince her to enroll. Abigail would have loved nothing more but shared that she had no way to pay for college. The program helped her find the funds and walked her through the application for college admissions and had been extremely helpful in the ensuing years in navigating all issues in school.

I interviewed Abigail on Skype and was instantly captivated by her sense of humor as well as the fact that she was the oldest of four girls. She shared that all six of her family members lived in the chaos of a two-bedroom apartment. This brought back my own memories of four teenage or younger girls in my family sharing a similarly small space. Abigail laughed this situation off and said it just motivated her to get out, to college or anywhere else. She also joked about being afraid of ICE, not because she knew what it was but because she said that was how
everyone felt about ICE. She was doing well in college but said she still had doubts about her abilities, probably because she was graduating “late.”

Ana began her college experience at a different institution, a private, Catholic, medium-sized university, where she had enough financial aid to attend (with a large loan) but not enough to live on campus. She therefore had a long commute to and from school and by the end of her first year she had lost her grant aid because of low grades. She recounted this time in her life with sadness and doubt in her abilities. Perhaps the high school counselor who laughed at her when she said she wanted to apply to this institution was right, maybe it was too much for her. Rather than lose hope, she looked for new opportunities and ways of reframing her experience. She was a psychology major and it was clear that she felt very resilient in college in recent years.

Ana was finishing her last year of college when I met her on Skype for the interview. After she transferred to a smaller school that was closer to home, she thrived there. I do not use that word lightly. She did not seem to have expectations for how she would do at this new school but vowed to work hard and now had the resources and circumstances that would allow her to flourish. Catching sight of her name on the Dean’s List would change her perspective for her remaining years. Rather than saying no to opportunities she would say “why not, why not me, and what do I stand to lose?” She made big plans and was not afraid of failure. She did not let an early failure define her self-concept. Ana already had plans for next fall, as she was enrolled in a master’s program in psychology and had a graduate assistantship lined up. Ana planned to apply to a PhD program eventually.

These introductions should give a sense of who each student is as I walk you through their varying actions in the sections that follow.
Meaning One—Critical Consciousness Differentiation

In this section of the findings, I provide examples of participants’ awareness of various forms of social, political, or economic power structures, as constructed by their stories. I do so to demonstrate how most participants stopped short of challenging these power structures when analyzed through a LatCrit lens. Therefore, through the first submeaning in this section I address how the students did and did not fully challenge the systems of oppression they observed playing out. I must state clearly that I do not believe whether or not they challenged systems of power is an either/or situation, as the participants were all on a spectrum and demonstrated varying degrees of questioning social, political, or economic structures that also varied by the situation. The second meaning connects the two paradigms used in this study, social constructionism and CRT/LatCrit. The use of both paradigms allowed for a holistic analysis of students’ narratives. This two-pronged exploration presented, on the one hand, the students’ constructionist stories, and on the other hand enabled an examination of the ways students might have refrained from questioning power structures and the impact of those structures on their lives and resilience.

In this meaning, I also sought to understand the impact of identity development, social and cultural capital, and social justice conversations on critical consciousness. The broader critical consciousness meaning is concerned with how awareness and interrogation of power structures show up in the narratives of the participants, and the second meaning is used to explore how this difference affected resilience.

Perceiving or Challenging Dominant Ideology?

Through a purely constructionist lens, what students saw as their critical consciousness did fit a partial definition of the term in perceiving power structures. They were certainly aware
of how socioeconomic class, race and ethnicity, and immigration status influenced their social and academic lives at college and their ability to be resilient. However, this was often presented in a deficit-based manner, which the students were aware of and sometimes seemed unsure how to reframe. For example, the influence of their social and economic class on their academics was brought up by multiple students. Ana recalled walking into a math class and not recognizing or understanding any of the material being covered by the professor. She knew her high school had fewer resources and programs and was less rigorous, but still felt demoralized by this experience. Ana had a hard time not comparing her situation to others’ and blaming herself for struggling academically despite knowing she had access to fewer resources.

I remember, I had a math class. And I walked in, and I’m sitting there and I’m lost. I’m like, What is going on? And everybody else looked like they knew what they were doing. And there was a White individual next to me and I asked them, like, oh, like, what chapter was it on? Or something like that. Like, where’s this coming from? And he’s just like, oh, no, this is, this is basically like a recap from what you should know, like, coming from high school. And it just kind of put like, you know, like, a wall between us like, oh okay. Like, it made me feel like, oh they’re more prepared than I am. So like, like, how do I even, like what do I do at this point, you know? But there are little instances like that, where I in my own mind, put me below someone else.

Alex shared a story about struggling in an art class, which was not his major, and noted the difficulty he had in the class affected his self-perception. Although after further questioning he recognized there was in imbalance in experience among his peers, he did feel judged by the professor and blamed himself for not doing well in the class.

Well I think the professor, like I mentioned, had really high expectations of the class. It was an introductory class, Introduction to Drawing. But a lot of the material, a lot of the technique, the professor, I think already expected you to know how to do. And for me, you know, like I always did, I always drew and painted and everything for fun. So was never anything academic.

I think I did blame myself for it. Because I wasn’t I think what the professor had in mind, and I think that a lot of professors have in mind is, you know, like only my class matters. Or at least that’s the attitude that I was getting from the professor at the time.
I do think they did [have previous formal art instruction]. I remember one time our professor was critiquing our work. And I wasn’t, I think I have, like I have to admit, I think I was the weakest student in the class. And I remember he compared my artwork to another, another student who had like her artwork was almost perfect, I would say. And he basically said all like, you can’t compare the two.

When I asked how the students experienced systems of power in college, they frequently shared stories of feeling incompetent or ineffectual academically and blaming themselves for not being able to keep up with their peers. They recognized that this was related to a lack of resources but nevertheless blamed themselves for what they saw as a flaw. It almost never was an overt racial incident, and many actually said they had not faced an overt racial incident. Instead, it was how their identity influenced the resources that were or were not available to them, as well as instances of feeling out of place because of their background.

Another issue brought up when asked how they had witnessed their critical consciousness was an awareness of status (e.g., socioeconomic or documentation) while growing up. Abigail described how her parents’ citizenship status affected their family growing up and how she became aware of the power this situation had on her.

So, I’ll talk about my critical consciousness just because I think I really project that a lot. So, growing up again having my godfather deported, I think that was one of the events that happened in my life that led up to me, really paying attention, to what was going on around me. So again growing up my parents were undocumented I was always scared of the police, but I didn’t know why. I was just scared of them. Just because my parents had talked about oh that’s like la migra [ICE] and I’m like I don’t know who that is but I’m scared. [laughs] I’ll just be scared, because they told me, you know. So again, like I always knew there were powers in our, in our society that could hold me back. But I just didn’t know why.

Other students who brought up their documented status or that of their parents expressed similar sentiments. Kimberly said her parents would not be attending her graduation precisely because of their fear of traveling while undocumented.
They have driven here prior but like with how bad things have gotten they felt really uncomfortable and they’re like well we can like bring one on your tias and your uncle, like to come with us like the ones who are documented. They could be the ones driving and I was like I don’t want to deal with people, and I was like no. I want to be free. I don’t want to be polite and talk to everyone.

The students overall readily identified the ways in which power structures disproportionately and indelibly affected their academic, social, and financial well-being. However, it was much more difficult for them to interrogate these structures and their normative acceptance and threat to self-concept. This was especially true when it involved their academic self-concept, which when left uninterrupted seemed to influence their capacity for thriving.

**Paradigmatic Distinctions**

Approaching the data analysis from both a social constructionist and CRT/LatCrit paradigm enabled me to analyze the nuances within students’ definitions of critical consciousness by investigating the moments when students challenged the defeated feelings brought on by seeing the ways they thought they were behind their peers. For some, challenging these feelings required in-depth questioning after they shared a story, whereas others brought it up, passionately, on their own. Using both paradigms also enabled me to see how a constructionist narrative might differ from a critical analysis of that narrative. The principal distinction would be that a student might not have achieved a critical consciousness as defined by the literature, however analyzing through a constructionist lens only might demonstrate a connection between critical consciousness and resilience but employing a critical lens could help in interpreting the influence of critical consciousness on resilience and thriving. In other words, there may a connection between critical consciousness and thriving that has not been exposed before.
For example, I questioned Alex extensively about his art class and how he might otherwise understand the experience other students had that he did not. I wanted to see whether there was any fragment of recognition of his own resilience, rather than blame, given the discrepancies between Alex and his peers. More than giving themselves credit for how far they had come, I wanted to see that the students’ questioning of these normative power structures might lead them to an asset-based perspective of themselves and their experience. The quote below is Alex explaining how he responded, even quietly, to the professor critiquing his artwork and comparing it to that of another student.

I was like well, I thought it was really unfair to say, hers is better, because, you know, like, I feel like she clearly did have previous art classes, or she had previously worked with the material, like, I feel like she had experience already. Whereas I was just starting out.

Alex and other students were most tentative about what they viewed as their academic shortcomings. The acknowledgment of the unfairness of some faculty’s judgements was the closest some students would come to challenging the academic discrepancies they knew were not their fault. Moreover, they sometimes understood that their socioeconomic class determined their preparation for college courses. A few were able to assure themselves of this and continue to develop a sense of self that included being good students. For others, it was difficult to resist the assumption that they were poor students. Kimberly, for example, often just said she did not do well because she felt she was “a shit student.” Likewise, Nancy shared a story of a professor who discussed her own career trajectory in class. Again, this was not overt racism, but it made Nancy uncomfortable that she could not relate to this person’s trajectory and made it obvious that Nancy would not have a similar experience because of her social identities.

I have a professor. She is a neuroscience professor, a graduate course for the semester, which was the hardest class of my life. And she was, she was at the beginning of class,
she’s like, I want to tell you guys this little story. And then she started going on about her life, which is like, both of my parents are professors, and they’re both doctors. She was saying how, you know, like, for her, she knew that she was going to become a doctor because her parents were doctors. And I was just like, I don’t know, I felt like her story was unnecessary, especially for those who can’t really relate to her. And she was just going on and on about her parents basically. And like, what they have done and what they’ve accomplished and publishing, and stuff like that.

In this case, I did not have to question Nancy to get her to explain why this story made her uncomfortable. Nancy clearly stated that not everyone would relate and then went on to explain how this same person did not understand her struggles as a student with minoritized identities.

Nancy did go out of her way to make a request of this professor that would help her be successful in class and recognized the inequity, but stopped short of confronting her when the professor refused to put a book on reserve.

And it’s funny, because it’s not funny, but in the beginning of the semester I couldn’t afford her textbook. And so I went to her and I didn’t want to tell her that I didn’t have it, but I just told her, can you put the textbook in the library so I can have access to it. She was she was like, no, I don’t, I don’t do that. I don’t want to put my textbooks in the library. And I was like, but I can’t. I was like, I bought the textbook, but it’s not going to come in for like about a week or so. I was just trying to like, you know, beat around the bush. But she basically told me no and then. So I had to I had to work for a few weeks, and then I was able to afford it. So I didn’t have the textbook throughout those first 2 to 3 weeks of schools. So I got 0s on the first assignments Because I couldn’t do them. I feel because she’s White like she just didn’t understand. Like you didn’t have to question me, just put the book in the library.

Nancy did interrogate the power structures and her professor’s inability to understand them but did not know where to turn for help in this situation and suffered academically as a result. In the end when she looked at her grades, she did not assign a cumulative effect of this type of microaggression. She simply blamed herself for grades that did not live up to her expectation, which in the meaning making of resilience showed up as a lack of thriving.
Conflicts in Identity Development

Students were much more inclined to challenge systems of power when challenging those systems related directly to their identity rather than academic accomplishments. Even if there were peripheral academic issues, if identity was the primary issue, the students were unyielding in their affirmation, activism, and asset-based perspective. Abigail’s quote below is an ideal example of activism that defends her community against a power structure, in this case the university’s policies that would limit students like her, yet she struggled in other instances to defend her own abilities when she felt confronted by the idea that she was not achieving enough. She challenged an academic policy for restricting educational access to communities like her own, but in the same interview critiqued herself for not graduating “on time” and assuming that made her a less capable student.

So now like, one of the things our college was like pushing for, was raising the minimum GPA to get accepted into the college. And to get accepted, I think you have to have like a 2.0 or 2.5. And they wanted to raise it to like the 3 or 3.5. And that’s one of the extremely major events, where I was like hold up.

I was like if you guys did that when I had just graduated high school, I wouldn’t be here right now, I wouldn’t have been exposed to all of these experiences. Or . . . so I’m actually going to Austria in 2 weeks, I’m like I wouldn’t be going to Austria in 2 weeks. And that’s when I realized, Okay, I need to be working for those people who don’t have a voice.

Similarly, Alex and Rodolfo shared a moment of defiant pride in their identity after realizing their identity could be seen as a deficiency, but they chose to reframe it positively and draw strength instead. Alex specifically spoke about his undocumented status in the quote below.

And I think to me like throughout the college experience and getting into college, it made me embrace more the parts of me that I didn’t know I had to embrace. So for example, like being undocumented, never really occurred to me. So it wasn’t really an issue that I had to look at until maybe junior year of high school where I was applying to colleges, and looking at what colleges I was going to apply, looking for scholarships. And I guess that was the moment where I realized that there was going to be an obstacle. But it’s not
going to define who I am. And again, like turning that into embracing those parts of me, I realized that being undocumented sometimes it is going to be a label that I have ended up carrying with me for maybe a couple of more years, but it’s not going to be the one thing that defines who I am.

Another aspect of this theme was the students’ awareness of the political landscape and the impact of their identity on their interactions with others. Flor described the political tensions between herself and other students, but also included faculty in her story. One story began with students sitting nearby loudly expressing their dissatisfaction with her openly speaking Spanish in a campus building. This story made her aware of how she had to be careful in general but developed into a specific story about how she had come to cautiously interact with faculty.

For the most part, since I always felt very close to my family, very family-oriented, when I started college it was really difficult because one, I was on my own and two, I had to know who was around me? Who can I trust? What can I say? What can I not say?

Yeah, they made it known cause of how they opinionated themselves and what they had to say. So, they would give a lecture and they would also give their opinion somewhere hidden in there. So, you would kind of know where he stands with his point of view. So reaching out to him was kind of like taking little baby steps with an email and then introducing myself in person and then getting them to help me get a better understanding of the class.

The students seemed hindered in their ability to process their identity development beyond bias incidents. They struggled much more to apply their identity development to their academic achievements. Recognizing racism is a difficult task but analyzing the impact of different forms of capital on their peers and themselves, as well as acknowledging the much more subtle microaggressions they faced, was incredibly strenuous. Kimberly struggled with accepting that her thesis work was a much more arduous process and did not question or seek to understand why this might be happening. Rather she accepted the self-criticism of her intelligence, capabilities, work ethic, or all of the above.
I went abroad to Morocco in the spring of junior year and I came back to write my thesis. I don’t know why I couldn’t write anything, just couldn’t fucking write anything. And I felt so bad and I was like, oh my God they [my college] gave me so much money and my mentor like has helped me so much.

Not unlike Nancy and her feelings about her grades, Kimberly recognized various forces or privilege others possessed that worked against her, but when examining the totality of a situation, blamed herself for her inability to accomplish certain goals that would have signified thriving. Kimberly did not give a second thought to whether she knew what and how she should be writing her thesis. At the end of the interview, when I asked her this question, she had a long pause before saying that her mentor was very helpful. When I asked her if she specifically knew or asked her what her thesis should look like, its purpose, or even what the different components of it should be, she quietly said no, she just blamed herself. The thesis and the change of major situation both contributed to her mental health issues, she said. She spent a lot of time in therapy trying to understand why she could not write her thesis.

Comparing Capital

Various forms of capital were highlighted by participants, again similar to previous micro-actions in comparison to what their peers possessed and they lacked. This constant comparison contributed to identity development and self-perceptions, sometimes in positive ways, but too often had a negative impact. One example was financial capital. It was very obvious to the students that they were not as well off financially as many of their peers and the way in which this played out was often through an awareness of socioeconomic differences followed by feeling demeaned by the students through their words and actions or simply the situation. Nancy described a summer program she attended in non-specific terms, but two characteristics of her description were clear. One was that most students had financial means
much greater than hers. Her college-access program covered spending money, for example, on top of paying for her to attend the program. The second was how being in the program made her feel.

And then the summer of my junior year, I went to Selective University and I did that for 3 weeks. So those two programs, they were really fun. Selective University, I would say was a little bit hard, because I was the only person of color . . . Yeah, so it was just such a different experience. That was something I’ll never forget. People are mean and people are racist. It was just really, really sad.

Rodolfo, on the other hand, spoke about perceiving the differences between himself and his peers and said rather than seeing that as a deficit, he chose to reframe the perspective that was taking shape in his mind, that of being lesser than because of this difference. Instead, he considered how he ended up in the same place as his classmates and that made him proud of what his parents had been able to do for him to arrive at this same place.

And I guess, it was also the first time that I sort of appreciated like, my like, I mean, I always appreciated my parents, but for the first time, that was when I really appreciated it, like what they’ve done for me, and like how I was going to school with all these kids whose parents were like CEOs and like, came from like, varied professions. And, you know, like, my mom never worked, she was a stay at home mom, my dad worked construction. And it kind of made me feel more proud of their identity that like, even though I didn’t come from that same background as those kids, like, I was still able to be there with them, thanks to the efforts of my parents.

Again, what was harder for the students to see was the capital they did possess. When I pointed out the navigational and linguistic capital Rodolfo possessed in transferring from one school to another, he did not see it right away. Then I asked him if he translated for his parents and to explain his process for doing that.

I mean, as I got older, I started putting things into Google translator. So I would just type it out so that they could get like the real word for word like, proper, like, words that they had to read and stuff like that. It was really what I started to do.
Rodolfo did see that this situation had in fact accorded him unique capital in life, but he also remembered the anxiety produced by being put in these types of situations. Most students acknowledged that translating had bestowed upon them a certain ability to navigate the adult world as young children but Abigail also pointed to the very real anxiety that surrounded those situations.

I think my mom like forcing me to speak for her, kind of shaped, who I am like as an extrovert now, but during the time, I guess, I was a very shy little girl. And like, I felt really uncomfortable, like having to go speak for my mom. And like I said, I didn’t know all of the words. So I didn’t want to say something wrong, that could potentially, hurt her in any way for whatever she was doing.

This unease could influence why the students did not see these skills as capital that could be leveraged in other situations. However, they did acknowledge how it had been helpful to them now, they just did not see it for themselves until we discussed it in the interviews.

**Processing Critical Consciousness**

The final submeaning of understanding the distinction in defining critical consciousness was the role social justice conversations played in that understanding. Most students felt they had a space or person to go to where they could openly ask questions, become informed about pertinent historical and political issues, and test their burgeoning ideas. Whether it was a class, a person, or a program, it was clear that the students felt this was a safe place for them to engage with social issues, especially as they related to their own identity. One student who struggled with questioning power structures was Kimberly and she was the first to say that she did not have a sense that she had a place to engage in these conversations. Not only did that space not exist for her, she said she had actively excluded herself from activism on campus because she did not feel there was a safe, judgement free space in which to engage openly in social justice dialogue.
Kimberly: If you’re in the activist circle, and you do anything wrong, they automatically ostracize you from the group, and this school is small so like that kind of also means that you’re ostracized from most students of color.

Norma: And what do you mean by wrong?

Kimberly: I’ll give an example. So, if you are friends with someone who is, uh a Zionist. You’re cancelled.

Abigail and Alex, on the other hand, both expressed that finding social justice classes empowered them. Abigail became vocal about her college’s attempt to change the required GPA for entering students and credited her social justice minor for helping her understand the complexity of racism and how it plays out in insidious ways. This led to her activism on campus around this issue. She describes the process below.

Going into high school, I don’t think honestly, like, our education system, isn’t that great. So in high school, I didn’t really know again, what was going on. It wasn’t until I got to college, I didn’t switch to a social justice minor until I was going into my junior year. And it was because I was getting exposed to in classes where we’re talking about, you know, structural racism, and we’re talking about all of these powers that are working against us as a person of color. And I didn’t really notice it until, like going to college. So now like, one of the things our college was like pushing for, was raising the minimum GPA to get accepted into the college. And to get accepted, I think you have to have like a 2.0 or 2.5. And they wanted to raise it to like the 3 or 3.5. And that’s one of the extremely major events, where I was like hold up.

Alex spoke about a class he took and said they specifically discussed immigration. He also shared rather ardently that he had become convinced that being undocumented would not define him. Though he did not specifically attribute these thoughts to the class he took, he did describe his experience in the class as follows.

In the class, we studied different methodologies to learn about Catholic social teaching, virtue, ethics, there were a couple more that we learned about. I think that helped me grow as a person but also other things that happened in other classes that I took during my first and my first year of college.
It is evident that the students required a space or people with whom to process their critical consciousness, but that space too often did not exist or did not go beyond just identifying the power structures that negatively affect students with minoritized identities.

Meaning Two—Resilience Versus Thriving

As explained earlier, narrative inquiry involves interpreting action and then assigning meaning to these actions or experiences. Like resilience, narrative inquiry is “always in relation, always in a social context” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). It is also marked by continuity, again resembling resilience in that “experiences grow out of other experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Given these relationships and my own understanding of the literature being an experience that preceded the writing of this chapter, I felt it necessary to weave the literature into this meaning as it was prominent in my thinking as I analyzed the data. Within the psychological resilience literature, in general, resilience is described as buffering factors, or factors that help in overcoming an obstacle and safeguarding against psychiatric disorders. Most studies did not include thriving in their definitions of resilience. In fact, this was what appealed to me about focusing on how Connor and Davidson (2003) described resilience. In describing these meanings, it is important to revisit this literature to understand that Connor and Davidson defined resilience as a multilevel process that can include simply recovering to a baseline when facing an obstacle, as well as a process that can build on itself so an individual experiences growth, or thriving, in his or her resilience.

It was not until I conducted the interviews that the distinction between resilience and thriving became clear to me and even revealed a truth about my own experience that I had not fully grasped. This truth was that I often felt I had not thrived in college, only survived it, not
unlike how Kimberly described her experience. That is to say I felt resilient for having accomplished the goal I set out to accomplish, which was to graduate from college, but had not been able to thrive while there. I found that many of the students I interviewed were similarly surviving, but not thriving, and they were conflicted. On the one hand, they were accomplishing their goal, but on the other hand they felt they were falling short, specifically in following through on the major they planned on, getting the grades they wanted, graduating within a specific timeframe, and understanding the career trajectory they wanted to follow after.

The Connor-Davidson (Connor & Davidson, 2003) scales have been touted as reliable and consistent in not just identifying resilience but also differentiating between high and low resilience. High resilience implies growth from facing obstacles or thriving. In a later study, Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007) narrowed the resilience factors to a reliable 10-item scale that demonstrated internal consistency and no redundancy between factors. These factors generally focused on and were grouped around four themes: growth mindset characteristics, self-concept, adapting to change, and general traits of persistence. There was some overlap between the psychological resilience scales and the educational resilience literature, specifically pointing to social networks, but the social networks themselves did not figure prominently in the meanings of this study, which surprised me, nor in the shorter 10-item scale. The 10 items identified by Campbell-Sills and Stein, however, were prominent in this study, leading to the question of whether they were more significant in thriving.

Furthermore, could having a critical consciousness affect these four items positively to enable a student to find ways to thrive? When students only perceived social, economic, or political forms of oppression they seemed more susceptible to a deficit-based self-concept, but
when they challenged these forms of oppression, they were more likely to have a more positive self-concept and ask why not try something difficult or unknown. Why not have a growth mindset? Why not make new goals?

**Self-Perceptions**

The self-perception theme showed up consistently among the students interviewed, as well as supporting that each student was positioned at different points of a continuum of this construct depending on the situation at hand. Abigail, Rodolfo, and Alex seemed on the cusp of thriving, but just when they started to see themselves as having and being enough, they questioned their resilience and their resilience growth for one reason or another. In Abigail’s case, she had a long commute to and from school and also worked. This commute did not enable her to take more than two or three classes at a time so her time to completion was going to be more than 4 years. After recounting all she had been through and expressing her pride in doing all that she had, she still could not let go of how long it was taking her to graduate.

I always tell my adviser I’m like, I know I’m a woman, I’m a person of color, I’m Mexican, my parents are undocumented but I’m like I feel how privileged I am, to just be in college, because I know there’s other students who come from the same background as me, have similar stories, and they can’t get into college, they don’t have the resources. So realizing how privileged I am in that sense made me realize how all of these other outside powers like politically are working against us.

Abigail said imposter syndrome did set in when she thought about her time to completion, which made me wonder whether it held her back from participating in other ways that would allow her to thrive, which would then make her feel more resilient. Connor and Davidson (2003) described resilience as a cycle that builds on itself and the thought that Abigail expressed below seemed to stunt that cycle.

Um, I think I’m still working towards my resilience. I mean, like, yes, like that, getting to college, then like thinking about my mom’s story. That definitely is a part of it. But I
don’t know, I think I’m still trying to . . . I think maybe because I’m not . . . So the fact that I’m graduating late, makes me feel like I’m not doing enough of that. I’m being too slow, or just taking too long. So that’s when the imposter syndrome starts kicking in. I’m like well these other students could do it in this time, why am I not?

Nancy similarly compared her achievements to those of other students. She recognized the rigor of her science courses and the amount of time labs added to her work, as well as how at least one instructor’s unwillingness to help hurt her grades, but she still held her friends’ grades as a benchmark against which to measure her accomplishments. Additionally, she was not able to explain to her mother why her grades were not as strong as they had been in high school and said her mother just did not understand. She was facing the prospect of telling her mother that she wanted to take a year or two off before veterinary school with dread.

I do a lot, a lot. Because I see like my friends, they’ll post everything on Facebook. And they’re like, Oh, this year, I did great. And they post their whole transcript. And then literally it’s As, As, As. 4.0. And like they’re on the Dean’s List. I’m just like, I’m like, that’s great. And like, my mom will ask for my grades, every semester she asks for my grades. She’s like . . . Typically, I’ll get As and Bs one time I got a C and that was horrible. That was bad. And yeah, my mom just gets really upset. She’s like this is not going to get you into vet school.

Um, and so I had my mom look over it [her resume] and she like saw my GPA and she’s like, “that is not good enough” she started yelling at me, and she’s like, you’re not going to get into vet school. And I was like, okay mom.

In both cases, Abigail and Nancy formulated a perception of themselves based on their understanding of what it means to be a good student. Kimberly referring to herself as a “shit student” and not a scholar was the extreme of this situation, but it is clear that most students internalized a perception of themselves based on their academic progress or lack thereof, quite often without recognizing the systems of power that worked against them in these situations.
Kimberly probably struggled the most with the resilience and thriving contrast. She said she felt resilient for being almost done and looked forward to graduation, but she also said she had nothing to say about graduation the way some people posted about it on Facebook. She seemed ambivalent about graduation and said it was mostly related to her change in major as well as not finishing her thesis, but also attributed her ambivalence to graduation to the fact that her college experience had had a negative impact on her mental health as well her self-concept. The quote below reflects her experience in with an instructor in an art history class and how it led to her deciding to drop the class and eventually the major.

And he’d [her friend] be like, you shouldn’t be crying after every class, like, this isn’t normal you shouldn’t be crying and I was like, no like I’m like a shit student. I can’t get back, what was I thinking?

I think that was like letting go of this dream [of being an art history major and curator] that I had held on to so fervently like for myself to go through it.

And that’s like for me like the big thing switching majors, I was like, I went from like art history to French and I was like, I don’t know what to do with French.

And in terms of like drawing the line there is knowing the limits. My own limit, like, yes I can persevere and yes I can try hard and yes I can like push myself through all this shit to like get to like a better future with this but in the end, I was like, it is not worth it. If I don’t get to where I want to be, or where I think I want to be in a healthy way.

I don’t think I’ve gotten to the point where I thought through everything or have forgiven myself for the choices that I made, not that they’re bad, it’s just not the choice I thought I was going to make.

Kimberly’s optimal response enabled her to make progress toward one goal—graduating from college—while giving up on an aspiration that would enable her to believe she had done more than just survive college, she would have felt as though she thrived in college. Though some may not see this as persistence through an obstacle because she gave up on completing the thesis, it
was unmistakably a situation in which she had to choose to survive the somewhat less stressful
situation of graduating college but give up the much more stressful experience of writing a
thesis, which she did not have the appropriate guidance to navigate successfully.

**Thriving Critically**

Although a few students demonstrated thriving to some extent, it was typically in short
bursts that were punctuated with doubt and hesitation. The clearest and most consistent example
of thriving came from Ana’s interview. She described various points of reframing her response
to obstacles, in that rather than feeling deficient she thought about the last feeling of resilience
she had and then intentionally decided to use that resilience to try something new. Ana was
adamant that even if she failed, she would learn something and grow from the experience. In the
testimonio below she described seeing her name on the Dean’s List and deciding to use that to
propel her toward applying for a program that made her uncomfortable but would undoubtedly
help her grow as a student and in her resilience.

> And, and I told myself, like, come on, like, we have to do this. Like, we have to get
through this and do better. So I think the moment that it hit me was when I walked down
the little hall and there’s like, a little like, Dean’s List on the wall, And I walked past it
and my eye caught my name. And I realized I was on the Dean’s List like I had, I went
from a super bad GPA, like nearly failing classes to straight As my second year of
college. So I feel like that’s where it hit me that, yeah, I went through something really,
really tough like to deal with a lot of negativity. But I didn’t let it stop me. Like, I knew I
have what it takes to keep going, even though it’s going to be hard. So that’s when I just
kicked into it and I kept going. I applied to a mentoring program [for students interested
in graduate school].

> So that was really, really scary and uncomfortable. And just the person who went
into that program, it was completely different to the one who came up from the other
side. And looking back to that moment to see my name on the wall, which was kind of
like a sign of you see, keep going, like you got this. It kind of showed me just how
resilient I am to all those different changes in just a short span of 3 years. And being
completely different at the end from the girl who didn’t even know how to get into
[previous university] from the train station, because it was weird. It was just like a
complete turn. And it just showed me that I do have the strength. And when I’m at my weak point like that strength is going to pull me through.

The psychological literature refers to this as a growth mindset, but in Ana’s example, she had to first consider the uncomfortable situations she had previously encountered and then acknowledge that other new situations would be scary and uncomfortable but would also help her evolve. In the consejo she shared she said she would never look to others for validation when she wanted to take on new challenges. Others might not believe in her because of her social identities but it was because she had overcome so much that she was aware that she could continue to overcome more. It was this awareness and questioning of normative expectations that allowed her to reframe new experiences and decide to take them on regardless of how difficult they might be.

**Setting Goals**

The importance of having and discussing goals after college or moving beyond the thing that has been the solitary focus and the benchmark for measuring resilience is important to thriving. In other words, applying or adapting resilience to new settings or goals is crucial to not just overcoming obstacles but growing from them. Again, students had varying levels of understanding and making postgraduate plans. Often the fear of facing yet another unknown and unchartered system paralyzed the students or at the very least made them waver in their decision. New goals represented another moment where they might fail or falter. Below is a quote from Rodolfo’s interview where he discussed his plans after college. Prior to this he had talked about the difficulty in navigating a career trajectory, knowing what kind of job he wanted or even understanding what kinds of jobs existed, and what those looked like day in and day out. He knew he had little understanding and compared his comprehension to that of peers who had
parents who had these kinds of jobs. Rodolfo also worried about networking and interviewing and being prepared for doing these things well. In the quote below he was responding to a question about what he planned to do after college and he vacillated quite a bit in determining his next step.

I don’t know. I mean, I might, I know our business school has a 5-year MBA program where you can just get your MBA in your fifth year, you have to apply for it in order to do it, probably by the end of this week. But I think that’s kind of like the option I’m looking at. I think it just kind of gives me another year to sort of really get a good, set a plan in place. Of course, I would want to start working right off the bat. But if that’s not possible. I think to advance my education a little farther. Within a year, I think it’s almost like the best economical option. Really. Actually, that’s what I think I want to pursue, but if not, I mean, just finding a related job. Yeah. Getting out in the workforce. Yeah. Definitely comes very fast at you.

Kimberly seemed to be an outlier in terms of making or thinking about plans after college in that her response was the most extreme. She had expressed disappointment in herself and in the quote below stated that the disappointment came from her school and the people there. In this example, it is difficult to know whether it was the lack of discussing and making plans that prevented her thriving or her lack of thriving that prevented the plan-making.

Because I did not and still do not know what I want to do.

And just like completely ignoring, and like not even wanting to think about the future, because I, I don’t.

After college, I don’t want to have. It’s not that I don’t want to have any goals but I don’t want to have anything that will disappoint me as much as this school did or as the people did.

Ana was once again on the opposite end of this spectrum in her ability to not only compose plans for her future but also to consider what that process looked like for her and describe it in detail. She thought about what the obstacles were and what about the new goal
made her uncomfortable and also considered how she would overcome that discomfort in order to achieve her new goals. She described this in her own words below.

I learned a lot about the whole college process, the whole research everything in [mentoring program]. So after that, I would just think about, okay, this is what I want to do in the future. What’s stopping me? Like, why can’t I do it? So I just had more of like a clear eye . . . I could pinpoint. Like, what’s scarier? Like, what’s the worst-case scenario? And how can I overcome that? Like, one of them was not knowing enough about a certain topic. Because to go to grad school, you have to, you know, you have to have an idea of what you want to do. So instead of just acting, like, I don’t know, I tried different things, like my [mentoring program] project was in IO psychology, because I didn’t know what IO psychology was. So I thought, Okay, let me just, let me just do a project in it. Like, let’s see, if I like it. I tried it, I did a lot of reading, I think the way critical consciousness comes in is that Now I can like step back and, and analyze, like, where am I going? And how am I going to do it? And what are the little like rocks [obstacles] that are going to be on the road? Like, that do I need to do to prepare myself for those?

Ana was the most specific in describing a process of making a plan and looking at what potential obstacles would surface with a focus on her social identities because those shaped her previous experiences and helped prepare her to overcome any potential setbacks.

Meaning Three—Cuentos, Consejos, and Testimonios

Testimonio is extensively discussed as both a narrative type and methodology used to share knowledge, ancestral wisdom, and legacies, much like cuentos and consejos. However, testimonio has a longer history in Latin American scholarship and now more recently in Latinx critical research. More specifically, this method has been used to acknowledge different ways of knowing, specifically to acknowledge counterstories that expose systems of power. Using testimonio and other LatCrit storytelling provided congruence between the method and the research focus. On a personal level, I enjoyed sharing all of the stories in this research. I felt connected to the students when they shared a cuento or consejo similar to one I had heard growing up. The very act of saying these words to each other told its own story that we were connected in some way. Uttering these words in a Spanish accent sent a signal that we spoke
each other’s language and understood a certain nuance in these words. Whether that was completely true or not is debatable, but the sense that I was having a conversation with a conocido (someone known to me) was there.

In Chapter 2, I stated it is important to understand how people construct resilience narratives even if they are unable to act upon power structures that influence them, not knowing how this study would unfold. This third action assigned meaning was a surprise to me in that it did in fact separate out cuentos about incidents that only perceived power structures and the students’ forthcoming resilience after these incidents and their much more questioning consejos. The meaning assigned was that students were more likely to tell their consejos in a way that challenged racism or other systems of oppression and they were more likely to only perceive these systems in their cuentos but not challenge or act upon them. Their consejos were more questioning and appeared to drive students toward action that might in fact lead them to thriving. Their testimonios were evenly split between perceiving and challenging. This was consistent with the translations of these words, which are described in detail below.

Cuentos

Cuentos were told not always focused on counterstorytelling as much as they were focused on identifying the racism or power structures students observed in their lives. Often, they were passive observations of how the students perceived power structures as acting upon them or their families. Most common among the cuentos was a story about a missed educational opportunity by another family member, an abuela (grandmother), una tia (an aunt), or mi madre (my mother). These cuentos often inspired students to set the goal of going to college but it was the consejos that propelled forward motion. Below are examples of cuentos told by participants.
So growing up in Mexico, well most of my family is in Mexico, I have an aunt that moved here a couple years ago, so the story that I’m about to share is about that aunt. And so my mom had, I think four siblings too. She said, she’s a third oldest, and then she had the younger sister. So there’s been a couple of times where my parents have told me that my mom’s younger sister, would sometimes cry, because she would want to go to school, but in Mexico, in the little pueblo that they lived in the opportunities are so limited. People really only have one to two options growing up. (Alex)

So my mom would always tell this story where she was growing up, she always wanted to go to college, okay, but because my grandma was so old school and had such old fashioned. Yeah, she didn’t believe that my mom should go to school. She believed she should get married right away, and just become a housewife and take care of her children and that’s it. She did finish high school. And right after my mom wanted to go to college, and my grandma’s like, no, you’re not going she’s like, you’re not going at all. So she’s like, okay, let me just at least try community college. So she went to community college only for a year. Because my grandma was literally nag at her every single day and saying do not go there. Do not go there. I’m not giving you any money. I’m not. I will literally give you money so you can stop going. (Nancy)

I would say that what really encouraged me to have a college degree was simply because I’m interested in doing it and because my parents were always determined in telling they never had an education, we never had the opportunity to finish our schooling. So we want you girls [Flor and her sisters] to have it because you are going to be basically the ones who represents us. The ones who speak for us, you are going to be able to show people who you are because of us. At the end of the day you are the people that that everyone’s going to see around us, you guys are a representation of us. So I want you guys to do your best to be able to do whatever you feel right and make your life easier. (Flor)

Consejos

Consejos convey actions and responses. Consejos ignited participants’ motivation with the way forward and gave them an action to put in motion. These consejos were powerful reminders to be proud of their heritage and their accomplishments. Rather than focusing on what they did not have, they focused on how far they had gotten despite their supposed deficiencies. One of the most powerful was Ana’s from her mother, which imparted in her a growth mindset.

And she kind of looked at me and she told me that I have to stop seeking validation of others when I make jumps in life. I think that’s my consejo, when I want to take a risk, when I want to do something, I have to go for it on my own. Because you don’t know how things are going to play out. They can’t see the future. So why should they tell you what you can and can’t do. That he laughed [her counselor] at me. But at the end of the
day, they did take me into Catholic university. Like it wasn’t a good match for me. But I did get in. So if I had listened to him, I wouldn’t have applied. And then who knows where I would have ended up. So she just basically told me to focus on whatever I want to do. But if I fall, or if I succeed, the most important thing is, is to learn a lesson from that path. Learn something. Even if it didn’t work out the way you want it. You have to learn something from it. Because those skills are going to make you better and maybe I’ll make a better decision or it’ll make you . . . Okay, it didn’t work for me this time. But I’m going to try again and different thing. Like I’m not going to give up.

Dweck (2006) stated in her research that a growth mindset is typically learned but not normally easily accomplished. I would add that it would be especially hard to acquire this trait of seeing failure as a learning opportunity and seeking new and unknown situations out when life is marked by an extraordinarily high number of unknown and uncomfortable situations. It makes this consejo an especially important action that leads to further action in the process of thriving. Knowing this when working with students with minoritized identities, who typically are encountering multiple obstacles at a time, could have compelling implications in student affairs practice.

Testimonios

Testimonio has its roots in social-political movements of Latin America but has been adopted by the Latinx/a/o community in the United States to continue to challenge oppressive systems as well as legitimize the voices of marginalized communities. Furthermore, testimonios, like cuentos and consejos, function as a way to share knowledge, legacies, and ancestral wisdom. The students’ testimonios were specifically focused on acknowledging a moment when they identified their critical consciousness or resilience. Some shared one story that encompassed both or one for each. Below are Abigail’s testimonios. Abigail described her critical consciousness as beginning to emerge the day she delivered the news about her godfather’s deportation.

So, I’ll talk about my critical consciousness just because I think I really project that a lot. So, growing up again having my godfather deported, I think that was one of the one of
the events that happened in my life that led up to me to really paying attention to what was going on around me? So again growing up my parents were undocumented I was always scared of the police, but I didn’t know why. I was just scared of them. Because my friends were scared of them or like me, that I saw, like, I would get scared. Just because my parents had talked about oh that’s like la migra [ICE] and I’m like I don’t know who that is but I’m scared. [laughing] I’ll just be scared, because he told me, you know. So again, like I always knew there were powers in our in our society that could hold me back. But I just didn’t know why.

She went on to describe the continued development of her critical consciousness more recently in college.

I didn’t switch to a social justice minor until I was going into my junior year. And it was because I was getting exposed to it in classes where we’re talking about, you know, structural racism, and we’re talking about all of these powers that are working against us as a person of color. And I didn’t really notice it until, like going to college. So now like, one of the things our college was like pushing for, was raising the minimum GPA to get accepted into the college. And to get accepted, I think you have to have like a 2.0 or 2.5. And they wanted to raise it to like the 3 or 3.5. And that’s one of the extremely major events, where I was like hold up.

The following was her resilience testimonio where she questioned, rather than affirmed, her resilience despite being on track to graduate simply because time to graduation had been extended by her long commute.

Um, I think I’m still working towards my resilience. I mean, like, yes, like that, getting to college, then like thinking about my mom’s story. That definitely is a part of it. But I don’t know, I think I’m still trying to . . . I think maybe because I’m not . . . So the fact that I’m graduating late, makes me feel like I’m not doing enough of that. I’m being too slow, or just taking too long. So that’s when the imposter syndrome starts kicking in. I’m like well these other students could do it in this time, why am I not?

Testimonio can be a powerful tool for counterstorytelling but there must be groundwork performed in first helping students better understand how systems of power encompass more than just racism and how that racism might affect their resilience and thriving. Students must first be able to question how and why these forces influence their thriving before they can bear witness to their own resilience and thriving.
Conclusion

These meanings begin to demonstrate the importance of critical consciousness in resilience, but more specifically in thriving. The story of critical consciousness and thriving is interwoven with identification and interrogation of systems of power, identity development that specifically uses internal formulas rather than external factors, locating spaces in which to process critical consciousness, and having those spaces go beyond analyzing racism, classism, or sexism but also understanding their effects on forms of capital. Without processing critical consciousness to this degree, students can be resilient but may struggle to attain growth in their resilience. The next chapter provides a holistic narrative to complement the meanings presented in this chapter by displaying the students’ actions in proximity to each other, which gives broader meaning to their experiences and to the way the actions presented in this chapter might lead to further action.
CHAPTER 5

PARTICIPANTS’ THREE-DIMENSIONAL NARRATIVES – EL RELATO

This chapter reflects the need to accomplish a different purpose than in the previous chapter. The purpose of presenting the three-dimensional narratives is to provide a holistic representation of each student, which requires a constructionism version of their stories as well as a LatCrit interpretation. Combining the two makes the narrative part findings and part discussion, so it is fitting that it sits in between those two chapters. My epistemology led to me to combine constructionism and LatCrit methods because I believe both are needed for a comprehensive understanding of resilience, but I now understand that it is because I also believe that none of us exists in a vacuum. We are influenced by what we see, hear, and how others perceive us, whether positively or negatively, and whether we acknowledge it or not. Too often these students were negatively affected by the comparisons they made between themselves and their peers. In the LatCrit interpretations, as Yosso (2005) suggested, I hoped to center their assets as more beneficial than they sometimes gave them credit for and to begin a new retelling of their stories, because as I have discovered it is about how you tell your story. El relato, or the narration of the story, matters.

Kimberly’s Narrative

Constructionism Lens

Kimberly was concluding her fourth year of college at a small liberal arts college. She grew up in a large urban city with her parents and brother. She described a happy childhood,
unaware that they did not have so much because her parents’ creativity allowed for this unawareness. They worked with her to make a dollhouse and clothes so it was easy to be oblivious to the absence of brand name things. Over time, Kimberly became more aware of their circumstance, not just in terms of the physical things they lacked but also the security they did not have as undocumented people. As she grew up and attended a selective high school in her city, she understood this difference meant her parents lived in fear of being discovered, whether driving, at work, or as she filled out paperwork for school. However, Kimberly drew a lot of comfort in her memories of her parents working hard to make a life for them in their basement apartments.

Kimberly also drew inspiration from her mother’s stories. For example, her mother had an opportunity to study in Mexico and enjoyed sharing a story as a way to try to connect with her daughter’s educational goals and to encourage her to continue despite obstacles. Her mother’s educational program may have been the equivalent of an associate degree in this country but was a rather difficult undertaking for Kimberly’s mother in Mexico. Kimberly’s mother had to travel to another city to attend school and often commuted between school and home for the weekends, sometimes missing class. She felt one professor in particular disliked her for this and made her experience more difficult by moving her to a final exam process, “extraordinarios,” not necessary for someone who had done as well as she had.

She was like, so I studied so hard, like I wasn’t gonna let him like have the satisfaction of failing me because he felt insulted as a man about a girl not paying attention to him or . . . not being able to go.

Her mother passed the class with the highest grade. Kimberly found that although her parents did not understand what her college experience was like, they did try and it brought her comfort to talk to them about it and to hear her mom’s cuentos.
Kimberly’s college experience had been challenging. She once called her parents in the middle of the night because she felt so isolated and sad. Kimberly described her college experience as taking a toll on her mental health. Her parents’ advice was everything comes to an end or this too shall pass, just make it to the end. Kimberly had lived by this advice, often citing a specific date by which everything would just be over. Her chief example was undertaking a senior thesis in her major. She applied for a grant, travelled to gather data, and met with her advisor, but was unable to write her thesis at various points. She identified dates by which it would all be over but was unable to finish the thesis. Although Kimberly felt defeated by this and sometimes felt it was proof that she was not a scholar or a good student, she still felt resilient because she would graduate at the end of that academic year. She also struggled because she did not have postgraduate plans. Kimberly said she just needed to heal.

LatCrit Lens

Kimberly had been resilient but had been so hard on herself about her ability to thrive, or going above and beyond the expectation she set for herself. She drew a lot of comparisons between herself and her peers and often saw the racism and systems of power that shaped their respective lives, but this perception often caused her to put herself down for not accomplishing the same rather than challenging the legitimacy of that system. One example she gave was in managing her relationship with a difficult instructor. It appeared to her that other students had a much easier time with this person and she had a hard time understanding why she struggled. Lareau and Weininger (2003) provided an excellent interpretation of this experience as students using cultural capital, distinguished from the typical highbrow cultural capital interpretation of Bourdieu’s work, obtained through their parents or guardians. In their interpretation, cultural
capital referred to the social norms students observe their families participate in that impose “a criteria of evaluation which are the most favorable to their” children (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 588). Would knowing that students had been learning to manage this type of relationship at home for years have made Kimberly feel less inadequate? How would she have engaged with institutional agents differently?

I hope she has begun to understand that there are a number of invisible privileges or cultural capital that may not seem obviously present but give those students an advantage. More than seeing a deficit, I hope Kimberly understands how far she has come and how much of it has been the result of the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) she acquired at home. Her family had been creative in finding ways to obtain what they felt they lacked to the point where Kimberly was oblivious to this as a shortage. Kimberly had this skill as well but focused too often on the gap she saw rather than on the proficiency she had to close that gap. She acknowledged a need to heal from her experiences in college but once she is able to reframe this experience to center on her ability to move through ambiguous situations resiliently, I hope she can focus on new goals because this too shall pass.

Nancy’s Narrative

Constructionism Lens

Nancy was completing her third year at a small liberal arts women’s college, which happened to be a 2-hour flight (not car ride) from home. This was not exactly what her single mom wanted for her, but she was also delighted that all three of her kids were attending college. Nancy’s mom dreamed of attending college herself and instilled in her children a desire to further their education because she could not. For her, the upcoming graduation of her oldest
child, a son, felt as though she herself was graduating. In another year, Nancy and her twin sister Nora would also graduate from college. Nancy’s grandmother had discouraged her mom from attending community college, as she believed her daughter should marry, have kids, and stay at home to raise them. Her mom eventually gave up, married young, and had three kids. They divorced when Nancy was in elementary school and that changed her life completely. The single mom and her three kids moved from the suburbs and their Catholic school to live in the city with their grandmother and special needs uncle. From then on, their family pooled together to care for her grandmother, who had dementia, and her uncle.

Nancy loved her grandmother. Despite the strong opinion she had about what her mother should do, she herself had been an active business owner alongside her husband, working long hours. She was an enigma that way. By the time Nancy moved in with her grandmother, her grandmother was already beginning to forget quite a bit, so Nancy never got to the bottom of that cuento. She did, however, spend a lot of time with her grandmother and helped care for her while Nancy’s friends were out playing in the neighborhood. This was not a demand from Nancy’s mother, but was in keeping with her own caring nature. It is hard to determine a middle child in their sibling line up but Nancy was born before her twin and considered herself the middle child. She certainly had the stereotypical characteristics of peacemaker and caretaker. Nancy helped her twin with homework growing up because of her twin’s learning disability and still did because they attended the same college. She also enjoyed spending time with her uncle who loved to participate in the Special Olympics and did so every year in a different event. He did not do all that well in the events because he was legally blind but he seemed to enjoy trying new events every year. He was Nancy’s role model.
College had been difficult for Nancy despite the two college access programs in which she had been involved. One was in high school and the other, with a leadership focus, was in college. The whole experience was different and far from home. She had her sister there so that had been helpful but socioeconomic issues had come up in her college access program group that were hard to navigate because they spent a lot of time putting together leadership summits for their school, among other things. Who had money for what and how everyone was doing academically seemed to be issues that came up frequently. Nancy was majoring in psychology and completing pre-med requirements because she was interested in applying to veterinary school but was struggling to maintain the grades she wanted. She found it hard not to compare herself to others or wonder whether she belonged there under those circumstances.

Her dad advised her to be true to herself when dealing with people who think they know her. Only she knows herself. Her first-gen to college organization helped her find a sense of belonging on days she was not sure she would make it through. There was even one event, an alumna panel of first-gen women, that made her realize others had come before her with similar struggles.

[They had] a hard time believing in themselves or beating themselves down. And I was like, yeah, that’s me. Like, sometimes I’m like, how did I even get here? Am I even really this smart? Am I even really, like, should I be here? Is this for me?

That panel helped her to believe she was that smart and should be there. Yet, even after saying this, Nancy recounted a conversation with her mother who was unaware what Nancy’s GPA was and that Nancy planned to take time off before going to veterinary school. Her mother was upset and wondered whether Nancy’s GPA would be enough. Nancy understood that her mom did not understand the process, but it seemed to concern her.
LatCrit Lens

Nancy had been as incredibly resilient as she believed herself to be, but where the worry came in was when she thought beyond college, as that goal had been the sole focus for so long. Nancy was able to find college access programs that helped her get to college with a significant scholarship, had been a caretaker and mediator in her family structure, and served as a facilitator for her peers at leadership summits. She did this by using the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) she acquired in her home. I hope she continues to reframe those moments when she feels lost. For example, much like she was able to find her college access programs, she should find the information that will help her with the next step of researching average GPAs and MCAT scores for veterinary school, as well as the average age of applicants and their work experience. There may not be programs for this process, but she has acquired the skills to reproduce the process through asking for help and even standing up to faculty who do not understand why a course textbook should be on reserve at the library, finding scholarships, and being a leader in her family and in her college community. This capital has served her well and she can continue to leverage it each time she encounters an unknown obstacle. She has come so far with it and it can certainly take her the rest of the way. Nancy will be able to see a clearer picture of her future goals the more she challenges these notions of not belonging, which are often rooted in classism or racism.

Flor’s Narrative

Constructionism Lens

Flor had just completed her first year at a large, public university. The option to stay in the city where she grew up was not all that appealing to her, so she opted to go a little farther
away to a different campus. Her middle sister will join her at this campus in the fall. She grew up with two younger sisters, her parents, and grandmothers who lived with them either full time or seasonally. She described her upbringing as strict and participated in two college access or academic enrichment programs. One of the programs included character education as well as religious and spiritual teachings. Getting to college was uneventful. She was admitted to some local colleges but decided to be far enough away that she could visit and have access to the varied resources and opportunities found on a large campus.

Although Flor’s father struggled with the distance at first, he was also determined that she achieve an education. It was her father’s cuento about their inability to get an education that motivated Flor while in college. He said that Flor and her sisters represented them in the world.

We never had the opportunity to finish our schooling. So, we want you girls to have it because you are going to be basically the ones who represents us. The ones who speak for us, are going to be able to show people who you are because of us. At the end of the day you are the people that that everyone’s going to see around us, you guys are a representation of us.

Her dad also wanted Flor to understand that this education would grant her the privilege to work with her mind rather than her hands, instilling a value in intellectual work Flor carried with her. Her father further inspired a pride in their language and heritage. The consejo Flor shared was about how her family at large had advised her to be herself and never change for others, but more than that to recognize her value as a person. This helped her stay motivated in college because when she became upset about other people’s judgements, she realized that other people were judging her without knowing her or the quality of her character.

She underscored this through her testimonio, which recounted the story of her having a conversation with a friend in Spanish and a young man sitting nearby saying, “the phrase, we’re in America, we speak English only or something like that.” This was not said to her directly but
instead was said indirectly and she therefore responded indirectly by stating, “we’re all immigrants, none of us are native to this country except Native Americans.” She continued by stating that her second language was actually an advantage in school and would be in the workforce as well. Moreover, she was proud of this language and would not stop speaking it in public spaces.

Flor also spoke extensively about connecting to faculty on campus. She recognized early on that it would benefit her to seek out her professors, but she was also aware that even among faculty she had to be cautious about how she expressed her opinions. Flor said that faculty made it clear where they stood politically, which created caution on her part but did not stop her from seeking them out. She was just careful.

So, they would give a lecture and they would also give their opinion somewhere hidden in there. So, you would kind of know where he stands with his point of view. So, reaching out to him was kind of like taking little baby steps with an email and then introducing myself in person and then getting them to help me get a better understanding of the class.

**LatCrit Lens**

It was difficult to find a way to narrate a LatCrit narrative about Flor. It is hard to tell whether this was because she was a much more cautious individual overall; whether I, as the researcher, was unable to see her story through this particular lens; or whether this was because she was in her first year in college and had fewer stories to share about being in college. It should be noted that the other person who did not have a LatCrit narrative was the only other first-year participant. I included both of these narratives because as more research is conducted, they could begin to fit in a larger pattern that emerges around resilience and critical consciousness.
Rodolfo’s Narrative

Constructionism Lens

Rodolfo grew up in the outskirts of a major metropolitan city. He attended a large and diverse public high school, where more than half the students were of Latinx heritage. Rodolfo said he never wanted for anything but did start working as a teenager to earn his own spending money. He did not do extra tutoring or test preparation for college entrance exams as he had no idea that was a thing. He was grateful for what he had and knew his parents worked hard and long hours for their family to live comfortably. Rodolfo’s parents spoke little English, so he often translated for them, including between his parents and other people or of important documents. He described the experience as uncomfortable because he was young and often had no idea what the English version meant, much less any clue how to translate it to Spanish. He confided that sometimes he just plugged the texts of letters into Google Translate to produce a perfectly translated Spanish version. Rodolfo’s high school was quite diverse and though he had to figure out the college and financial aid process mostly on his own, he never thought of himself as disadvantaged and felt most of his friends were in similar situations. This was how Rodolfo ended up attending a large state university as an out-of-state student. If there was nothing to worry about in high school, there would be nothing to worry about in college.

Rodolfo arrived at his large state school and was surprised to find himself feeling lost and isolated, maybe even anxious and unhappy, though he had never had any mental health issues in the past. He made friends easily but nevertheless did not feel he could be himself on this campus and was often troubled by the realization that he was the only Latino in various settings. He made a sort of pact with himself that he would go through an entire semester before he made a
decision about this new environment. Yet, even as he described his decision to stay and give the school a chance, he seemed unconvinced that he could be happy there. More than that he seemed perturbed by the idea that he would never fit in. He constantly compared himself and the students who surrounded him. The resources and capital to which they had access seemed much greater than those to which Rodolfo had access. This made Rodolfo appreciate his upbringing and parents so much more because he had arrived at the same place given the very lopsided resources he had compared to his peers. However, he also considered the vast differences in their backgrounds and felt he was already behind in so many ways.

Eventually, Rodolfo returned home for the longest break he had had to date and started looking into transferring. He began by Googling schools, which was reminiscent of his translating days relying on Google to get him out of an uncomfortable situation. Rodolfo was determined to continue in school, in large part because he felt there was a dichotomy between valuing physical labor over intellectual labor in his community. Laboring like their parents did and making money right out of college seemed a more worthy endeavor than going to college. Rodolfo could not get on board with this notion and neither could his parents, who often told Rodolfo that they were working (physically) hard so he would not have to. As supportive as they were, they did not completely understand what he was going through in college, but a cousin who had gone to college sat him down during the transition from one school to another and gave him a consejo that he still holds onto. She advised him:

I mean, you shouldn’t be ashamed of your background whatsoever. You shouldn’t be ashamed that your dad is a construction worker. You should just be proud of where you come from. And never forget that at least. And sort of like, don’t become, even when, even if, you are successful one day, just always remember where your foundation came from and who laid that out for you and was able to do that for you.
Rodolfo’s cousin was able to help Rodolfo reframe the experiences he had been having in his first semester of college.

**LatCrit Lens**

What I hope Rodolfo is beginning to understand is that the capital he has is just as worthy as that of his peers. It is precisely what enabled him to navigate his college application process and later college transfer. He acquired certain skills and capital as a result of working at a younger age than his peers, translating for his parents, and finding information for himself that he could not easily access through his parents. Said another way, Rodolfo had community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in abundance, a unique capital acquired by his upbringing, which he leveraged to better understand the resources to which his peers had access. I hope each and every time he compares himself to others and thinks about what he does not have he remembers how far he has come using the capital he does have and finds a way to use that capital again to his advantage to continue to grow and thrive.

**Alex’s Narrative**

**Constructionism Lens**

Alex was a first-year student at a small, private, Catholic university located in the suburbs of the city in which he grew up. He planned to major in economics and neuroscience. Alex moved to the states when he was 6 years old and lived without his parents for most of that time. He did not really see this as a challenge but also did not have early memories of his mother. While in Mexico, he lived with a grandmother and aunt. His parents always had high academic expectations of him and his siblings. He had two younger siblings and an older sister who paved the way for him to college. They attended the same university and both had the same scholarship
for undocumented students. He did not see his citizenship status as an obstacle in this regard, possibly because he had a roadmap already laid out for him.

Growing up, Alex heard the story about how his aunt would cry because she wanted to go to school and was not able to do so. He recognized early on what a privilege it was for them to receive an education in their new homeland. This is one reason he worked to do well in school, because he saw education as a right rather than a privilege and he held it up as an extremely valuable opportunity. He attended enrichment summer programs and truly appreciated the opportunities these experiences provided him. One of those schools became Alex’s top choice school but he was not admitted there. He actually received a few rejections, which he knew were coming because of his citizenship status. Alex said he was prepared to go to community college if he needed to but was admitted, received a scholarship for undocumented students that paid his tuition, and then found more funding so he could live on campus.

Alex conveyed a deep sense of pride in who he was and where he came from. He attributed this to a consejo his dad shared with him that states, “It’s not that I forgot where I come from, it’s just that I don’t know where I am going.” The process of applying to college really brought this to the forefront. Alex said applying to college “made me embrace more the parts of me I didn’t know I had to embrace.”

So, for example, like being undocumented, never really occurred to me. So, it wasn’t really an issue that I had to look at until maybe junior year of high school where I was applying to colleges, and looking at what colleges I was going to apply, looking for scholarships. And I guess that was the moment where I realized that it was going to be an obstacle. But it’s not going to define who I am. And again, like turning that into embracing those parts of me, I realized that being undocumented sometimes it is going to be a label that I’ll carry with me for maybe a couple of more years, but it’s not going to be the one thing that defines who I am.
In a college ethics class, Alex witnessed the development of his critical consciousness and described it as a realization that “immigration is a big issue here in the U.S., you know, like not that I wasn’t aware of it before. It just opened up my mind more to how unfair it is really.” Alex was drawn to stories of immigration and hardships associated with this experience in class. This made him feel grateful for his situation and led to the conclusion that he had a responsibility to do well for that very reason; because he was an immigrant and undocumented, he should serve as a role model for others as well as help those in need.

**LatCrit Lens**

Alex was the other first-year student and it was also difficult to capture a LatCrit narrative. He appeared to vacillate between being confident in his interrogation of systems of power and displaying tacit acceptance. This was not that dissimilar from other students but other students were so forthcoming and transparent in their responses that I was able to analyze and create a critical narrative from their interviews. Similar to Flor, this could be because Alex was more careful or restrained in his responses because of his citizenship status or because he had fewer stories to share as a first-year student, or again because of my inability to see Alex’s story through the LatCrit lens.

**Abigail’s Narrative**

**Constructionism Lens**

Abigail grew up in a medium sized city in the southwest and attended a small, public, comprehensive state college several miles outside of the city. Her parents were divorced and she had been living with her father since then and eventually her three sisters joined her as well. Her commute was long. She took public transportation 2 hours each way to get to school and back.
She was majoring in criminal justice and minoring in deaf and social justice studies. Although she knew she wanted to go to college, she was not sure how she was going to accomplish this goal. Abigail found a program that helped first-generation to college students navigate the college experience and applied to it but then realized she did not know how she would pay for college. The program staff, however, called her regularly to convince her to enroll. They told her they would help her figure it all out and began by walking her through the university admission application. She had been an active part of the program since then and often visited with program staff any time she had questions.

Abigail shared the very personal story of her mom’s immigration to the United States at the age of 14 or 15 and shortly thereafter dealing with domestic violence while in a relationship with Abigail’s biological father. Abigail was told this story when she herself was 15 years old and it left an impression of all the difficult things her mom was able to persist through. Abigail felt that her mom and the man she knew as her dad had made too many sacrifices and been through too much for her to not try her best. Another experience that left an indelible mark was when she was very young, possibly 9 or 10, her godfather was wrongfully arrested. The family waited for him to be released but had no way to obtain information. They decided to call the police station and had Abigail call as the only English-speaking person in the family. A call that should have just told them when they could expect him home ended with the news that her godfather was being deported because he was undocumented. Abigail remembered it as news that caused a lot of distress to her family.

Aside from the commute to school and feeling lost in class at times, she also struggled with the combination of the two. She said that sometimes “when I’m in class, and I’m like, I
don’t know what that means that I don’t want to ask because everybody else seems like they have it down.” Add a long commute to this disorientation and it could create some pretty stressful situations. One of the situations she remembered most vividly was coming home in tears at the prospect of writing a 10-page paper, which she said she did not know how to do and was also more limited in terms of time than others because of her 4-hour round-trip commute. Her dad gave her the consejo to think about how far she had come so she could keep pushing forward. He was also prepared to roll up his sleeves and work alongside her.

He would sit down and he’d be like read me your prompt, and I’ll try to help you with it. When I mean, his education is just a high school Mexico education. And he would sit there trying to understand what my paper was with me. So I think that was another thing that I was like, Okay, yeah, like, I’m gonna get through this.

Abigail described her critical consciousness beginning to emerge the day she delivered the news about her godfather’s deportation.

So, I’ll talk about my critical consciousness just because I think I really project that a lot. So, growing up again having my godfather deported, I think that was one of the events that happened in my life that led up to me to really paying attention to what was going on around me? So again growing up my parents were undocumented I was always scared of the police, but I didn’t know why. I was just scared of them. Because my friends were scared of them or like me, that I saw, like, I would get scared. Just because my parents had talked about oh that’s like la migra [ICE] and I’m like I don’t know who that is but I’m scared. [laughing] I’ll just be scared, because he told me, you know. So again, like I always knew there were powers in our in our society that could hold me back. But I just didn’t know why.

She went on to describe this development more recently in college.

I didn’t switch to a social justice minor until I was going into my junior year. And it was because I was getting exposed to in classes where we’re talking about, you know, structural racism, and we’re talking about all of these powers that are working against us as a person of color. And I didn’t really notice it until, like going to college. So now like, one of the things our college was like pushing for, was raising the minimum GPA to get accepted into the college. And to get accepted, I think you have to have like a 2.0 or 2.5. And they wanted to raise it to like the 3 or 3.5. And that’s one of the extremely major events, where I was like hold up.
LatCrit Lens

In the story about uncovering and defining her critical consciousness, Abigail clearly articulated those powers that held her and her family back and challenged them. She even stood by the assertion that the GPA should remain lower to give more students like herself an opportunity to attend college. Yet, in recounting her resilience narrative it was her time to completion that distressed her most. She blamed herself for the length of time it was taking her to graduate and seemed to feel it contradicted her belief that she was resilient.

Um, I think I’m still working towards my resilience. I mean, like, yes, like that, Getting to college, then like thinking about my mom’s story. That definitely is a part of it. But I don’t know, I think I’m still trying to . . . I think maybe because I’m not . . . So the fact that I’m graduating late, makes me feel like I’m not doing enough of that I’m being too slow, or just taking too long. So that’s when the imposter syndrome starts kicking in. I’m like well these other students could do it in this time, why am I not?

This situation she faced, “graduating late” as she put it, was just as unfair as changing the GPA requirements to enter college. She had to commute a very long distance because of her financial and personal situation and this influenced her time to completion. Nothing, not her intellect or her work ethic, influenced her time to completion as much as her financial and personal circumstances. Abigail was incredibly resilient, but was also capable of thriving, or going above and beyond her own expectations, simply by using the capital she already had to set new goals. These should not be the goals she thinks she should abide by, but her own that take into account the difficult situations she has encountered and overcome, but largely still lives with. She should always remember how far she has come because that is how much farther she can go.
Ana’s Narrative

Constructionism Lens

Ana grew up in a major metropolitan city and was the oldest of four siblings. She was a psychology major at a small, private university in her home city. Her parents immigrated from Mexico, so her childhood was punctuated by moments of incertitude, either because of not knowing what would come next in her life in this country or by the crime in her neighborhood that kept her in her home most of the time. Despite not knowing what came next, Ana made a commitment to understand how to navigate her future, knowing she had to do it on her own because her parents were unfamiliar with the college trajectory. Ana therefore relied on her school, specifically her counselor, to help her navigate the college application process. She was influenced to choose education because of a cuento told in her family about her grandmother. Her grandmother had an opportunity to obtain an education and escape her troubled homelife by entering the convent. There she was given the opportunity to continue her studies so she could be the teacher in a nearby town. Although the opportunity was paid for by the church and she seemed keen on the idea, she ultimately rejected this in order to marry and become a stay-at-home mom. Ana often wondered about the what ifs of her grandmother’s situation and how all their lives would be different if she had been allowed to pursue her education and marry, but back then this was a choice to be made.

Ana felt she drew strength from this story because even though in the end her grandmother did not get the education she could have, she did escape a difficult situation at home and rather than dwelling on the negative aspects of the story she moved forward positively in her life. Ana could make similar comparisons to her own life. She relied on a counselor for
help in high school only to be openly derided by him. Ana felt she had strong enough grades to attend a private university in her city and her counselor laughed at her and told her to aim lower. Even some family members told her she was too dumb to accomplish her goals. She did get into the university but did not get enough financial aid to live on campus and had a very long commute to and from campus on public transportation. Neither Ana nor her parents wanted her commuting in the late hours, so she opted to begin her classes at 8:00 a.m., which meant she had to be out the door by 6:00 a.m. Her last class had to end on time so she could be home before sunset.

Eventually, this took a toll on her grades. She had very little time to do homework because she was extremely hesitant to take her computer out on a bus or train and was not getting much sleep. Ana was already feeling behind without taking this commuting issue into account. She had walked into her math class early in the semester and had never before encountered the material being covered. When she asked a student sitting nearby, he said it was not from their textbook because it was review of what they should already know. The comment only overwhelmed Ana more.

Regardless of how difficult all of Ana’s struggles in college were and despite her feeling as though her parents did not understand, her mother gave her a piece of advice that had stuck with her. She told her:

That I have to stop seeking validation of others when I make jumps in life . . . when I want to take a risk, when I want to do something, I have to go for it on my own. Because you don’t know how things are going to play out. They can’t see the future. So why should they tell you what you can and can’t do. He [the counselor] laughed at me but at the end of the day they did take me at the school. So, if I had listened to him, I wouldn’t have applied. But if I fall, or if I succeed, the most important thing is, is to learn a lesson from that path. Learn something, even if it didn’t work out the way you want it. You have to learn something from it. Because those skills are going to make you better in the future
and maybe you’ll make a better decision or it’ll make you think . . . Okay, it didn’t work for me this time. But I’m going to try again in a different context. Like I’m not going to give up.

Ana did not give up. She transferred to a smaller school with a shorter commute and began to thrive there. She knew she was resilient when she passed a board that listed the names of students on the Dean’s List and out of the corner of her eye something caught her attention. She stopped to examine the list closer and though she knew she was doing well felt a shock and thrill to see her name. This set her on a path to apply to a program that prepared undergraduate students for doctoral programs through research and other scholarly activities.

**LatCrit Lens**

Aside from learning how to have a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), Ana learned to challenge rather than just perceive systems of power.

I think my identity is one of the reasons why I have such a, like an up and down kind of journey. Because like, it’s really hard to get rid of biases. So like, since the start, the statistics were not for us. Like they were not for me. They were telling me, okay, only 30% are going to graduate in this amount of time. This many students like actually go to college. So since the beginning, I was already doubting myself, that I wasn’t enough that I wasn’t smart, that I wasn’t even supposed to be in college. I think in the beginning, my identity, I know, pushed me down, it just bounded me all the way to the ground, like the very bottom floor. Throughout the journey, I thought about it differently, like, oh, it’s not that I’m not good enough. It’s not bad that when I walk into the classroom, there’s only a couple who look like me. But instead it’s, look, if I do it, look what I’m showing, like my siblings. Look at, like, just by me being here. It’s showing other people that think they can do it too. It’s very easy to get lost in those statistics. And doubt yourself to the point where you maybe fulfil that prophecy that you’re not good enough, right?

Rather than dwell on shortcomings or biases as she called it, she thought, “What’s stopping me? Like, why can’t I do it? So, I just had more of like a clear . . . I could pinpoint. Like, what’s scarier? Like, what’s the worst-case scenario?” This enabled her to try difficult things and to make plans beyond college, which had been the sole goal for so long. Now she had new goals, a master’s program in psychology and eventually a PhD, and if she felt the doubt
creep in she thought, “maybe we’re not on the same level right now. But at some point, I’m going to meet you there.” I hope every time she encounters the unknown or uncomfortable she always remembers this mantra that has served her so well in her resilience and thriving.

**Norma’s Narrative**

Here I will add my own narrative as I progressed through the data collection and analysis of the data. This narrative was derived from my observations during interviews, the researcher journal, and insights that emerged as I wrote the meanings and narratives. To be honest, I found the process of writing this narrative surprising. The reflection I engaged in brought me to unexpected meanings in my own life about my own resilience and thriving.

**Constructionism Lens**

I am sitting at a coffee shop in a neighborhood I have known and walked through at various times of my life, waiting for Nancy. She’s running late so I have time to look over the interview protocol, check the recorder (again), and look through my notes from previous interviews. I also have time to stare out the window at the buildings lined up along the street. I recognize both the current feel and layout of this neighborhood but can also point to missing or new buildings. In some ways it feels the same and in others it is a different world. It is the same with my own life. I recognize thoughts as my own but also understand the ways in which something is new or missing in them. Below is an excerpt from my researcher journal after interviewing Kimberly and I am reflecting on how much that interview reminded me of old thoughts.

Just finished interviewing Kimberly and there was so much she said that resonated with me. It really took me back to a time in college when I believed my failures were my own fault. Similar to her I felt like I was playing a victim if I identified the ways in which I
lacked certain resources to do as well as my peers but had no trouble comparing myself to them in terms of accomplishments.

I still have trouble not thinking of setbacks as my fault. I am at the end of my third year in a PhD program and have passed comprehensive exams, defended my proposal, and had my IRB and candidacy application approved. I struggled most with comps and at times thought it must have been because I was not ready. However, I was able to persist because I told myself that I was learning, and learning was about acquiring new knowledge, which necessarily would mean stumbling through the process. I said this to myself almost like a chant, on repeat, in my mind. Yet, an insidious thought snuck in over and over again—what if the struggles were a signal that I was not capable. It did appear I was the only one struggling through comprehensive exams. I allowed myself to think this thought one single time. Then I reached into my years of professional experience to remind myself that not everyone shares their struggles openly and I could not compare my learning to anyone else’s. By the end of comps, I found myself thinking I should have excelled at this because I had been an excellent student my whole life (except in college). Then I realized college was different than all my educational experiences prior to college and so the same was true of comps. Comps and everything that followed had to be difficult because it was not like being a student in a classroom at all. It was completely different. Everything about it was completely different. Why had I blamed myself so much? It was a new experience that required a growth mindset as well as a new way to think about my resilience.

Kimberly’s story also brought me back to my current life as a parent who helps her own children make meaning of their resilience and thriving.

She also shared a story about her thesis and the level of procrastination involved in that. I have read that procrastination and task avoidance has been linked to mental health issues, specifically anxiety. She never once thought that other kids, who spent their summers going to camps and having other experiences she didn’t have might have also begun a
mental health practice early in life. This I understand from my own experience raising my children in a solidly upper middle-class environment where parents share these resources and encourage each other to seek help for their children earlier in life. I have researched on my own, brought my children to therapists, and worked on coping skills for both task avoidance and anxiety about tasks that overwhelm, after receiving guidance from therapists and discussing with therapist friends. The amount of resources poured into my kids reminds me how I had to learn that on my own.

I have learned so much about how resilience and thriving are connected to anxiety and task avoidance from raising my kids. This is the reason I was able to have that chant running through my head during comps. I had to follow my own advice to my kids—do not compare yourself to anyone else, you have no idea what they struggle with and vice versa, and focus on your own learning (said in my mom voice). This also demonstrated the level of cultural capital that is passed on from parents to kids, similar to what Lareau and Weininger (2003) detailed in their research about parents modeling to their children how to manage various educational experiences in school, as well as indicating to their children that intervening with institutional agents is expected.

A different theme that emerged for me started to take shape after interviewing Flor and Rodolfo. Their stories about translating and seeing how those experiences seemed to shape who they were and how they operated as students made me think about how I had been shaped by similar experiences. Some of Flor’s cautiousness seemed to develop as she translated between her concerned and guarded parents and various officials. Rodolfo relied on the Internet to alleviate the anxiety brought on by not knowing much about a problem he was facing, whether that was translating correspondence to his parents or his own college application and later transfer.

I recalled my own experiences translating for my mother during my parent–teacher conferences. I could not openly say anything to either party without being found out—I did not
always report when I had homework—but I had to be sly so as not to be found out. Therefore, I would rely heavily on body language. I was watchful for the moment my mom or teacher would be on to me. What was their body language saying that their words had not yet conveyed and I had to get ahead of it. By early high school my mom had learned the word homework, but more than that she understood “not working to her potential.” I did well on tests early on without doing homework and I had been discovered, but I spent a lot of my childhood hiding that fact. This might explain why a growth mindset was difficult for me. I had grown up thinking and being told that I was just smart. I had a fixed mindset. I could not grow my intelligence because it was fixed.

When I was 7 years old my 10-year-old sister translated for my parents when my newborn sister was in the NICU. Hospital translations have always been the place I watch most closely for body language. That seems to tell me more about a prognosis than anything else. I watch for people’s hidden message, their intentions, and their sentiments toward others. I wrote the following after a few more interviews.

Anything I understand about how to work with other people I learned from translating for my parents. I looked to my parents’ body language to know when they were saying they didn’t agree with something but were nodding their heads yes and could deduce that they were doing it because they thought it was appropriate.

I was content through this research process to realize that I could point to the ways in which I was resilient and even some of the capital I had acquired that had helped me along the way.

LatCrit Lens

I have entitled this dissertation the Shadow-Beast, a reference to Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2004) rebel “that refuses to take orders from outside authorities” and “kicks out with both feet”
at the “hint of limitations . . . by others” (p. 38). I chose resistance as a theme in my own resilience narrative; however, does that not imply that I have given enough credit to someone else’s impression of me to care to resist it? Despite all of the practices I have honed from rearing my children, awareness of the assets I bring from home, and understanding of research around various psychological constructs, I have defaulted to the notion that my resilience is tied to someone else’s opinion of me. I have fallen short of the full meaning of this type of capital, resistance, described by Yosso (2005) as challenging the inequity in the very idea that I am not capable. That means looking for the ways that inequity shaped my ability to do the same as my peers.

This disrupted and unsettled what I understood intellectually to be my resilience narrative, but I saw the truth in it at the same time. I spent a lot of time pondering this development and finally arrived at what Connor and Davidson (2003) had already divulged to me, that resilience in one area does not transfer to other areas that easily. Trying something new, such as comps, was proof of this idea. I was able to use a number of other experiences to persevere, but the jolt was felt nonetheless. Furthermore, although resistance could see me through to resilience, I do not believe it served me well in seeing me through to thriving. For thriving, I needed to center my own goals, my history of being resilient, the skills and capital I have acquired thus far, a growth mindset, and a self-concept that is not influenced by perceptions of and comparison with others. I have to retell this story in a new way.

**Conclusion**

The development of these three-dimensional narratives allowed me to begin to comprehend the theoretical and practical implications for this research study. The meanings on
their own demonstrated the components of critical consciousness and resilience, but the narratives validated the complexity of the process that should connect these two constructs. Furthermore, the narratives confirmed that resilience research should extend to include identity development as part of the process that helps students arrive at a critical consciousness and strengthen resilience and thriving.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS – HOW WE TELL THE STORY

So many of us go through life with our stories hidden, feeling ashamed or afraid when our whole truth doesn’t live up to some established ideal. We grow up with messages that tell us that there’s only one way to be American – that if our skin is dark or our hips are wide, if we don’t experience love in a particular way, if we speak another language or come from another country, then we don’t belong. That is, until someone dares to start telling that story differently. I had nothing or I had everything. It depends on which way you want to tell it. (Obama, 2018, pp. 415-416)

Michelle Obama told her story, which I would categorize as all three, a cuento, consejo, and testimonio, in her 2018 autobiography. I read it thoughtfully the summer I collected data. She told stories about her parents and her own struggles and the injustice in so many of their experiences. She focused on advice she had received from a variety of people in her life about so many aspects of her life, from facing the new challenges of being a student at Whitney Young and later Princeton, to tackling the trials and tribulations of being the first lady of the United States. Her testimony was about being aware of the inequities but not letting them define her and then going one step further to reframe that story, because in the end it is about how the story is told. Though the fabric of her stories felt different than my own and those of the participants, there was a likeness that resonated with me. Said another way, we might tell different cuentos, consejos, and testimonios but there is a similarity in how racism influences our resilience and thriving.

Resilience researchers have achieved an admirable feat in developing scales that can describe, with variation, the resilience of an individual. In other words, these scales are able to
reveal low and high resilience, from a decline in functioning to thriving, yet they reflect very little about the process or theory of resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Furthermore, the extant psychological literature on resilience is neglecting the context in which individuals must develop and operationalize their resilience (Ungar, 2011). Though the educational resilience literature provides some specificity about ecological factors and even contains speculations on additional factors (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2000), there is an absence of focus on how these factors engage with the resilience process and especially thriving. In this research I set out to understand the influence of systems of power, in other words the context, on resilience narratives to begin to theorize how the process might develop for Latinx/a/o college students. I uncovered a complex process of critically conscious resilience that involves an identity development practice that moves students through meaning making of dissonant external experiences to an internal formula (Torres, Hernández, & Martinez, 2019) that promotes their community cultural wealth and other asset-based habits (Yosso, 2005).

In this chapter, I consider how the findings contribute to the extant literature and discuss the implications for practice, as well as suggesting further research. First, I consider how critical consciousness influences students’ resilience narratives by examining the meanings and connections to critical race theory. I argue that the tenet of challenging dominant ideology, through the process of identity development, can help students better recognize and elevate their own community cultural wealth. Next, I evaluate how the resilience factors narrowed from Connor and Davidson (2003) by Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007) can aid and demonstrate the differentiation between resilience and thriving. Although I set out to better grasp the resilience construct, how students were able to thrive emerged as more significant because the students
were certainly resilient but were struggling to thrive, which has powerful implications for theory and practice. Finally, I review the literature on cuentos, consejos, and testimonios to better understand how or why consejos emerged as more questioning of dominant ideology than cuentos. In my previous role in a college access program, it was wholly accepted that students could improve their outcomes by simply sharing a story about their background. The pride they felt in sharing that story can certainly be helpful, but it can also, without appropriate guidance, simply highlight the negative differences they are perceiving. Michelle Obama’s quote summarizes the implications quite well. How we see ourselves and how we tell our own story matters and it matters most in outcomes. The structure and language may make it familiar across groups of people who share the Latinx/a/o identity, but elements of these findings may resonate with others with minoritized social identities.

Influence of Critical Consciousness

Stanton-Salazar (2011) argued for critical consciousness as a crucial first step in the resilience of students with marginalized identities. His argument was based on the premise that students would seek help more readily if they understood power structures, but I will go beyond that to argue that a critical consciousness is what enabled students to challenge dominant ideology, which directly affected their resilience. Before I launch into this discussion, I explain what is meant by critical consciousness. Stanton-Salazar (2011) interpreted Freire’s notion of consciousness “as the ability to perceive and interrogate the social, political, and economic forms of oppression that shape one’s life and to take collective action against such elements of society (or social structure)” (pp. 1089-1090). Hernández (2012) similarly defined the political consciousness process, whereby an “individual gains an increasingly complex understanding of
politics, how one’s identities influence life experiences, and how one’s awareness of politics and identity influence actions taken to challenge social norms by participating in activism” (p. 682). Both definitions focus on not just observing systems of power and oppression but also challenging them. Stanton-Salazar (2011) stated that once aware of these forms of oppression, students would be able to seek out the help of institutional agents, which would allow them to be successful in school. Hernández (2012) went further to state that students might participate in activism. Both of these phenomena were observed and though awareness led some students to activism, they did not always challenge racism when it involved the assessment of their abilities, especially in comparison to others. In other words, they were willing to stand up for others but hesitated to stand up for their own abilities, which affected their resilience negatively. This seemed largely influenced by their understanding of capital and their identity development in relation to their social identities. In other words, how students saw themselves, specifically their ability, was influenced by how they viewed what others had and what they lacked.

**Challenging Dominant Ideology**

In her seminal work, Harris (1993) described the intertwined nature of Whiteness as property, which later evolved into White privilege, and meritocracy. One exists because of the other. The idea that an individual is entitled to certain rights or privileges because of his or her race later gave way to the concept that all things are earned because in the absence of race as a reason for entitlement there was perceived merit. It erased the history of White property rights but allowed many to feel entitled to certain privileges. A modern-day example given by Harris related to college admissions and the assumption that affirmative action is displacing deserving and “innocent White” students. The property is an admission acceptance, which according to
White privilege, rightfully and instinctively belongs to White students, due to merit. This is the dominant ideology that all of us live with and can be impossible to grasp, much less question. In the examples below, I demonstrate how the students struggled to understand how power structures affected their lives.

In this study, for example, Ana observed the math student who knew the material being covered was a review from high school, Alex thought his art instructor just had high expectations of the students, and Kimberly’s family appeared to accept that their undocumented status should be hidden at all costs even if it meant missing her graduation. These ideologies were difficult to challenge because the system appeared fair and everyone seemed to be competing on a level playing field or had access to the same opportunities, such as in their education or in becoming documented. In these situations, challenging the dominant ideology could look like political activism or engagement in an anti-deficit self-perspective after interrogating the systems that created these issues. Often, it was only after following up with several questions that the students realized that these were indeed not fair circumstances. As I will continue to discuss in this chapter, the students did, sometimes on their own, question these unfair circumstances for some situations, but struggled to question systems with regard to their academic abilities.

**Complementary Paradigms**

Social constructionism distinguishes “the hold our culture has on us; it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!)” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). It gives weight to how society shapes individuals’ realities while still confirming their legitimacy. Critical race and Latinx theory demand an interrogation of those realities, recognizing that a person with a minoritized social identity can “buy into and even tell majoritarian stories,” in
other words a story “that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming their social locations as natural or normative points of reference” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). The previous example about Kimberly’s parents’ undocumented situation demonstrated this idea. It can be difficult to challenge these dominant ideologies without a comprehensive framework for understanding how and why these normative points of reference exist.

Alex’s documentation status is another example. He asked to be interviewed over a phone call and it made me wonder how much his undocumented status affected him. It is at times like this that I was glad for the dual, although sometimes competing, paradigms. Through the constructionism paradigm I saw that his pride in his social identities was his authentic perspective and likely bolstered his self-concept and resilience. The CRT paradigm, however, can call into question that there may be moments, much like with resilience, where that pride falters. This might be an example of an optimal response, which I will review in the subsequent section.

**Identity Development**

Understanding identity development requires insight into various elements, specifically identity salience, self-perception, and encounters surfaced as crucial to the influence of critical consciousness on resilience narratives. Identity salience refers to the difference in significance of an individual’s social identity when they are in the minority as opposed to when it is shared by most in the community (Torres, 2003). In the latter scenario, the individual’s personal identity is most likely to prevail. Not only do students’ identities become more salient in more diverse
environments, they also experience greater cultural dissonance, or disagreement, between cultural/familial expectations and those of peers or professors (Torres & Hernandez, 2007).

Flor, Rodolfo, and Alex all spoke about being more acutely aware of their identities once they arrived on campus. For Rodolfo, it was a shock to feel completely isolated when he had always felt happy and comfortable in a school he thought of as diverse. Yet, his first-choice school, the large, public university, was a marked difference to his high school. Despite these feelings, both he and Alex said sensing the difference made them proud of where they came from and of their parents’ efforts to get them to college. For Flor, this difference generated a deeper sense of caution and wariness than she already carried with her. For some participants, how they constructed their identity may have changed when they arrived on campus as a result of the change in salience. Furthermore, this construction may have been influenced not just by how they saw themselves but how they saw themselves in relation or comparison to others. This self-perception was not necessarily formulated by others’ direct opinions of them, though sometimes it was as in Ana’s story about her counselor, but instead by students’ assessments of themselves in comparison to their peers. Yet again, challenging these ideologies related to identity formation was not something in which the participants routinely engaged.

**Forms of Capital**

Often students’ comparisons were rooted in their peers’ social or cultural capital and affected their mental health. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) argued that this might be the case, that students with minoritized social identities do not have access to the same social networks as White students, which can affect resilience but also lead to “alienation and to behavioral patterns that further compromise their psychological development” (p. 228). Stanton-Salazar further
contended that identifying this differential as established by social, political, and economic forms of oppression would propel students to seek out institutional agents for help. Although students did in fact intentionally seek out institutional agents when they needed access to specific information their family could not give them access to, this seemed transactional in nature.

For example, Abigail looked to her bridge program to apply to college and for specifics about navigating college. Nancy had her college access programs to turn to as well when she needed tangible help. She turned to them when she applied to summer programs, needed help with financial matters, or organized leadership summits. Rodolfo and Kimberly were able to point to opportunities, camps, and access to jobs that their peers had but struggled to see the more subtle forms of cultural capital their peers possessed. For instance, Lareau and Weininger’s (2003) description of cultural capital that emphasizes parents’ transmission of “a sense of entitlement and propensity to intervene as well as a set of techniques for doing so” (p. 593). Kimberly particularly struggled with managing a difficult relationship with an instructor in a department she wanted to major in and ultimately dropped the class and the major. Kimberly never questioned the blame she placed on herself for this situation and was surprised when I described this type of capital after the interview. She also said she did not know where to look to understand why this happened so that she would cease blaming herself. She was at the time seeing a therapist.

Yosso (2005) disputed that students are not devoid of capital that helps them navigate various normative structures. Instead, she outlined the various types of community cultural wealth students with minoritized identities have access to as aspirational, familial, social, linguistic, resistant, and navigational capital. Students easily highlighted their familial and social
capital, some noted resistant and aspirational capital in accomplishing their goals, and a few were even able to point to navigational capital in getting to college. Linguistic capital was harder for them to identify as contributing to their success in college, although once I questioned and we discussed they saw the parallels in the skills they developed translating to skills they used in college. What they had the toughest time with was considering this combined capital as equally helpful as the forms of capital their peers possessed.

**Fostering Counterspaces**

It was evident from the findings that the students need a space to both learn and rehearse how they might challenge dominant ideology. They all found this in different spaces, but unmistakable was the need for Latinx/a/o students to counter their negative perceptions and comparisons in “academic and social counterspaces in which they build a culturally supportive community and develop skills to critically navigate between their worlds of school and home” (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 660). Yosso et al. (2009) specifically highlighted the effects of microaggressions and campus climate on Latinx/a/o college students, and much like in my research study, found that students questioned their academic merit and sense of belonging. Similar to the students in my study, the participants in the Yosso et al. study felt they had to “prove themselves” and found ways to engage in literature and community in order to understand how to articulate their interrogation of systems of power, or in other words to develop critical navigation skills. Yosso et al. (2009) stressed that often students build or find these communities themselves.
Redefining Critical Consciousness

Though I agree that challenging and actively working against systems of power is just as important as perceiving those systems to the definition of critical consciousness, there has not been enough research on the process of moving through each of these elements. Hernández (2012) focused her research on “the process in which an individual gains an increasingly complex understanding of politics, how one’s identities influence life experiences, and how one’s awareness of politics and identity influence actions taken to challenge social norms by participating in activism” (p. 682). However, Hernández focused on participants who were becoming aware of, challenging, and taking action in social issues on campus as they related to their identity as Latinas and as part of the larger Latinx/a/o community. As I explained in an earlier section, students were proud of their identity, family, and larger community and appeared more comfortable challenging and taking action against those issues. Where they struggled was in challenging stereotypes, microaggressions, and assumptions about their identity as it related to their academic standing or merit.

From this study, I have developed a new understanding of the process of arriving at critical consciousness. As with Hernández’s (2012) model, developing a social awareness is necessary, specifically in relation to how students’ identities shape the obstacles they face and how they are able to overcome these obstacles. However, because of the nature of resilience in an academic setting, the process used to challenge and act against systems of power may feel self-centered, which is difficult in a culture that values community so highly (Yosso, 2005). Critical consciousness consequently requires both an understanding of the capital to which non-minoritized students have access or embody as well as having an asset view of their own capital.
The rationale for understanding the capital of students with non-minoritized identities is that systems of oppression have been built around people having this particular capital to navigate those systems. In essence, it is a way to understand the rules of engagement so they may better understand how to navigate these systems of power themselves or how to disrupt these systems. The second part is to see their own capital as assets and use this capital to navigate those systems, possibly in a different manner so as to disrupt those systems. Seeing their capital as an asset may be what feels egotistical in particular. Understanding the developmental nature of critical consciousness is crucial to understanding its influence on resilience and thriving.

**Role of Thriving in Resilience**

Connor and Davidson’s (2003) resilience scales, though not able to assess the resilience process or theory of resilience, can be significantly instructive about resilience and thriving. First, their definition of resilience includes thriving, whereas many others do not. Results of Madewell and Ponce-Garcia’s (2016) study indicated the CD-RISC was able to detect higher and lower levels of resilience. It is likely sensitive to variation in resilience because it includes thriving. Most resilience researchers are investigating for psychological distress or overcoming obstacles but Connor and Davidson (2003) included growth from the experience of overcoming an obstacle. They described it as a reintegrative process with four possible outcomes. One outcome is explained as a process that can build on itself so an individual experiences growth in his or her resilience. Another consequence to “disruptors” is “a return to baseline homeostasis, in an effort to just get past or beyond the disruption” (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p. 77). A third response identifies “recovery with loss” (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p. 77). The fourth response is deterioration and a decline into a dysfunctional condition.
Participants in the current study demonstrated varying outcomes. One explanation is that they were engaged in a variety of obstacles, with the largest being navigating college. Therefore, they might be resilient, even highly resilient, in overcoming general obstacles in their ability to complete college but may have struggled when pursuing other side ventures that included different obstacles. Additionally, their ability to complete college might have been affected by more or different obstacles (e.g., commute, distance from home, higher variation in grading scales from previous educational experience). As Connor and Davidson (2003) pointed out, the ability to overcome one obstacle does not automatically translate to other obstacles. Participants demonstrated varying degrees of coping in the most relevant factors identified by the analysis and refinement of the scale done by Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007) related to self-concept, persistence, growth mindset, and adaptation, and these correspond to the meanings I found in my own study. In other words, the meanings I identified in this research correlated with those that were most relevant in the refinement scales developed by Campbell-Sill and Stein. However, I contend that there are varying ways of understanding those same constructs when social identities are taken into account.

**Self-Concept**

The idea of self-concept is different but related to self-esteem. Self-concept is the view of self based on personal traits, attributes, or skills, whereas self-esteem is a belief in one’s worth and can be affected by self-concept (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Larsen McClarty, 2007). Self-concept, self-esteem, and other self-beliefs are sometimes referred to as self-views and include self-efficacy, which is defined as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1994,
The concept of self-perception discussed in the identity development literature connects to this as well, though it is specifically focused on the impact of society’s view of a social identity on a person’s perception of the self. There are a multitude of encounters and constructs that contribute to self-concept, and all of the constructs described here can certainly have an influence. There were some clear connections between these concepts for the participants as well as more ambiguous associations.

Abigail’s story was punctuated with moments of doubt in the midst of feeling content and fortunate to be exactly where she was despite the obstacles she had faced. She found herself comparing her graduation timeline to other students and feeling she fell short of some expectation of a norm or requirement to be like her peers. She related that this doubt manifested as imposter syndrome or feeling like a fraud. Kimberly explained how she struggled through a class and relationship with the instructor before eventually dropping the class and her dream major. In doing this she referred to herself as a “shit student.” In another story about procrastination on her thesis, she related how working on it made her feel like a scholar but then she could not finish, implying that she was not a scholar. This was a more subtle expression of Kimberly’s self-concept. Nancy’s story painted a blurrier picture as well. She discussed her GPA and shared her mother’s concern that it was not high enough to get into graduate school, as well as indicating that she did not feel she belonged at her school for this and other reasons. Nancy did not directly articulate her self-concept but appeared to question her self-efficacy. These self-concepts of being bad students may have contributed to their inability to thrive in college and were much more associated to social identity than the psychological resilience literature recognizes.
Persistence

Another factor that emerged as predictive of resilience from refining the Connor and Davidson scales was persistence. I would argue that this surfaced in my own study in various ways. One way was certainly a simple tenacity or an ability to remain engaged in the struggles in one’s life and “to practice self-discipline” (Wagnild & Young, 1993, p. 167). However, given the social identities of the students who participated in this study, I believe this may have also shown up as optimal responses. Clauss-Ehlers (2008) described in one study how students were managing stressors in their lives through means that were considered adaptive as well as maladaptive. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) suggested this might be something they termed optimal response, which means responses need to consider context and may involve “tolerating one stressful situation to prevent an even more stressful one” (p. 231). To persist when facing so many varied obstacles, individuals sometimes have to make the very difficult choice to tolerate taxing issues in life to avert others.

The participants who stood out as using optimal responses were Alex and Kimberly. Alex stated several times that he avoided thinking about his undocumented status in order to persist in his quest to apply to and graduate from college. He was determined to find a way around that status and even had an alternate plan to go to community college if he was not admitted to any school or could not find funding. Kimberly avoided the challenging relationship with her professor and changed majors in order to continue at and graduate from her college. She also spoke openly about her mental health issues in attempting to pursue a thesis. She could not find an answer to why she procrastinated writing her thesis, so she decided she had reached the limit of her ability to remain healthy and dropped the thesis. The ultimate goal for these students had
been to graduate from college and they knew they could not risk other issues affecting their achievement of that goal. As Rutter (1985) wrote, “What is important may be not so much the specific method of coping than the existence of a coping process at all” (p. 607).

**Growth Mindset**

This is a term found within Dweck’s (2006) highly publicized research. It is also a construct in the resilience scales created by Connor and Davidson (2003) described as “not easily discouraged by failure” (p. 78). Dweck (2006) more specifically defined growth mindset as struggling, making mistakes, and even failing as a necessity to grow and learn. She further explained that growth mindset is not an innate trait but is instead learned. We are all monitoring incidents in our lives as positive or negative, but the difference in having a growth, versus fixed, mindset is focusing on what can be exposed from the negative to grow and learn. Dweck then described how cognitive therapy helps people focus on their negative thoughts, such as I am a “shit student,” and to look for facts to disprove these thoughts. For students with minoritized identities, this can be trickier to discern for reasons outlined in the critical consciousness section of this chapter. The most significant is simply having a thorough understanding of systems of power and oppression and how they determine normative structures (e.g., time to completion, campus life participation, college accomplishments and accolades), and being able to challenge those structures.

Alex was very quick to assume that he just was not a good art student when he struggled in a class he thought would be easier compared to his major classes. He said the instructor expected more, even while he described the countless hours he spent on the projects for class. Once I questioned him about his classmates’ previous experience with formal art training he
realized that he was trying to cram in the years of training they had into many hours in one semester. He was not a terrible art student, he was just learning. Growth mindset can be especially difficult when it is assumed everyone has the same preparation, as any failure is viewed as an innate deficit of the struggling student. Ana had the same experience in her math class but had an inkling she was less prepared after talking to a student nearby who said the math they were covering was from high school. This information did not stop her from being discouraged. Whether it was because her mother had specifically given her this advice or she had found ways to disprove this thought, Ana eventually learned to just try something new and if she failed she would make sure she learned something. She purposefully went into new situations thinking she might fail but she would learn from the experience.

**Adaptation**

Adapting to change is something the participants seemed able to do extraordinarily well given their ability to navigate college as first-generation college students, a completely new experience. Some struggled to see that ability and focused too often on how new situations challenged them. Adapting appears to be a crucial component of resilience as it enables resilience to transfer from one situation to another. The literature, however, often defines this term as positive coping, and conversely defines maladaptive coping as a negative coping mechanism. As described in a previous section, even maladaptive coping can lead to resilience. However, to positively cope, or adapt, means to see that there are varying ways the world is structured and rather than negatively comparing yourself to others, which would be considered maladaptive and could lead to overcoming an obstacle, applying community cultural wealth and skills learned from previous obstacles faced could lead to growing from the obstacle or thriving.
Clauss-Ehlers (2008) described a culturally focused resilient adaptation model as “a dynamic, interactive process in which the individual negotiates stress through a combination of character traits, cultural background, cultural values, and facilitating factors in the sociocultural environment” (p. 36). This model centers cultural values and background as part of this dynamic process.

Ana demonstrated this dynamic process in her growth mindset framing of her education. Not only was she not discouraged by failure, she sought out new experiences that would bring growth through her adaptation of previous skills learned, as well as her cultural capital. Kimberly, on the other hand, ended her story by stating that she was actively avoiding any new goals or situations for fear of disappointment or failure. My own story confirmed to me that new experiences can lead to overcoming obstacles with a return to baseline or recovery with loss, rather than growth. Intentionally adapting resilience factors to new situations can make the process of thriving much more fluid, but it is a very difficult process for those who have continually faced obstacle after obstacle. Understanding the developmental nature of critical consciousness is crucial to understanding its influence on resilience and thriving, which I explore next.

**Toward a New Understanding of Resilience**

I want to reiterate that the factors identified by Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007) are indeed highly reliable for both resilience and thriving, though I want to generate a new interpretation of these factors for students with minoritized identities. Because the components of the refined scales were arrived at using a monocultural sample, they cannot reflect the values, theory, or processes of resilience of students with minoritized identities.
The development of Latinx/a/o students’ resilience and thriving requires embracing their assets, which again may feel self-centered and a splintering from their cultural values, as well as an intentional reminder that they have overcome other obstacles and can do it again, which may feel like self-praise and again feel egotistical. Within a community that values community and family so strongly and prioritizes this over individualism, grappling with these practices in order to be more resilient, or moving beyond that to thriving, would be difficult and require guidance. Arriving at a new understanding of these specific resilience factors is fundamental to understanding resilience but even more important to grasping how critical consciousness affects resilience.

**Critically Conscious Resilience**

Taken together, these meanings have led me to a new term: critically conscious resilience. The complexity of this process is created as a result of both critical consciousness and resilience/thriving being developmental on their own. The progression of critical consciousness through understanding the intricacy of how systems of power are part of both creating the system itself and affording those with majoritarian identities the currency to navigate the systems is complicated. Finding counterspaces to discover and explore these ideas on campuses that do not intentionally create these spaces further complicates the process. Additionally, seeing their capital as an asset may feel counterintuitive to their community-minded perspectives. This can easily be countered by demonstrating that what students are doing is in fact elevating their community, and not necessarily themselves. Finally, reminding themselves that they have overcome so many obstacles, likely many more than the peers to whom they compare themselves, may feel like self-praise but can lead to a growth mindset and adaptation to new
circumstances. This process involves an identity development practice that moves students through meaning making of dissonant external experiences to an internal formula (Torres et al., 2019) that promotes their community cultural wealth and other asset-based habits (Yosso, 2005). I have included a visual process graphic (see Figure 2) to help in understating critically conscious resilience, with a detailed description below.

![Figure 2. Depiction of the process of developing critically conscious resilience.](image)

(1) Identify and challenge how dominant ideology has contributed to the creation of obstacles faced by students with minoritized identities.

(2) Mitigate external perceptions of students’ identity, specifically in relation to their academic achievements and their embodied capital.

(3) Elevate community cultural wealth as a strong enough currency to navigate their college process.

(4) Persist and learn to stay engaged in obstacles, as well as giving yourself (and your self-concept) grace for choosing optimal responses when faced with multiple obstacles.

(5) Adapt this knowledge to new situations, both to remain resilient under new circumstances but also as a way to grow your resilience or thrive.
Cuento/Consejo/Testimonio

Finally, storytelling and counterstorytelling have been central to research involving Latinx/a/o peoples. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), “The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). A variety of specific and culturally relevant tools have been used to share these stories in research, from cuentos to testimonios. Testimonio is extensively discussed as both a narrative type and methodology, and cuentos and consejos are also discussed as narrative typologies used to share knowledge, ancestral wisdom, and legacies. However, testimonio has a longer history in Latin American scholarship and now more recently in Latinx critical research. More specifically, this method has been used to acknowledge different ways of knowing, specifically to acknowledge counterstories that expose systems of power. Using testimonio and other LatCrit storytelling provided congruence between the method and the research focus.

Solórzano and Bernal (2001) further described the varying types of resistance as conforming, self-defeating, reactionary, and transformative that can emerge in storytelling and did surface in a variety of ways in the cuentos, consejos, and testimonios of the participants. As described in the critical consciousness section of this chapter, there was often an awareness of racial privilege but not always an analysis and questioning of that privilege. Though testimonios are a person’s statement of their reflection of a particular self-discovery as influenced by their critical consciousness, as well as a means to question and transform these systems, students did not always take the extra step to challenge these stories. This seemed a function of how the students understood the term and their current feelings around their resilience or critical consciousness. Cuentos, however, most often reflected only a perception of social injustice.
There is little research on consejos as a catalyst of intentional resistance to inequality, but Delgado-Gaitan (1994) described it as a way to impart “feelings, perceptions, actions, and responses” (p. 289).

Perhaps because consejos are a narrative of action and response and not just perceptions, students more often shared consejos that did in fact suggest an intentional or transformative reaction. There were a few consejos, such as those shared by Rodolfo and Flor, that focused on pride in their cultural and socioeconomic identity. Rodolfo decidedly shared his pride in understanding the difference in cultural and social capital between his peers and himself and still arriving at the same place. Flor was proud of her language and background despite being categorized as different by other students. Ana’s consejo was focused on not seeking validation from others or in comparison to others. She had and planned to continue to challenge herself consistently and not worry about failure. Ana’s mother’s directive was unequivocal, learn something. The advice students received and shared with me is what propelled them toward their goals in a way that cuentos did not seem to do.

**Nuancing LatCrit Methodological Approaches**

How people make sense of their lived experiences varies by social identity. Cuentos, consejos, and testimonios can all be powerful ways to understand one’s own knowledge of self, but some may be more powerful than others. Testimonios and consejos appear to focus on the counterstory in a way that is more likely to expose and challenge the normative hegemonic narratives that surround students in college. Consejos can be a powerful tool when paired with testimonio to not only center the lived experience of a person but to elicit an action.
Theoretical Implications

Aligned with the discussion above that highlights this study’s contributions to the body of knowledge on college students’ critical consciousness and resilience, there must be a reconsideration about how to approach resilience theory and research.

Psychological Resilience Field

There are three key points to bear in mind in the area of psychological resilience. First, social identities matter in resilience and the resilience literature should extend to include ethnic identity development in general, but more specifically how identity development influences critical consciousness. Second, resilience is intertwined with critical consciousness in a way that affects the growth of resilience or thriving. Beyond including identity development in the resilience research, the concept of thriving should not be disregarded. Its importance cannot be overstated as it can be the difference between just surviving a stressor or flourishing. Finally, the tools used to construct resilience narratives are essential to driving an action and asset-based representation. Cuentos, consejos, and testimonios can all be powerful as ways to accomplish a narrative that moves students toward their goal, but this research revealed that consejos can be more effective than cuentos in accomplishing this objective.

Social identities matter in resilience and thriving as they determine the context of the obstacles people face (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000; Ungar, 2011). Awareness of how social identity shapes lived experience is part of the critical consciousness definition, but this term goes further to describe an interrogation or activism as part of the definition (Hernández, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). It requires a nuanced understanding of how identity is shaped and factors that contribute and result from that identity formation (e.g., a grasp
of cultural and social capital, as well as community cultural wealth). It is not enough to simply make sense of racism, which is a daunting and difficult task in itself, as students must also grapple with how systems of power influence the normative capital their peers use to progress toward thriving, but also the capital students with minoritized identities can leverage to do the same. Torres et al. (2019) argued that ethnic identity development is a multi-faceted process that requires the complex process of recognizing and processing how racism influences an individual’s development of identity. I would add that identity development also influences the development of resilience and thriving.

Educational Resilience Field

Educational resilience researchers have certainly recognized the importance of identity, but stopped short of understanding the complexity of the process. “A major problem with studying resilience if that the term is used to describe both the outcomes and the process leading to those outcomes” (Ungar, 2011, p. 4). Resilience as a process necessitates an engagement with critical consciousness and as an outcome includes thriving if someone has moved beyond just perceiving to questioning social injustice. The educational resilience literature does not capture the dynamic and multi-layered nature of resilience.

Furthermore, this strain of literature did not employ the incredibly important concept of anti-deficit thinking. Researchers have certainly acknowledged that students felt inferior and requested assistance but did not look further into how this could be converted into asset-based thinking. For example, Cabrera and Padilla (2004) concluded that students are resilient in large part because of their family support, but also cited a lack of capital that is often held by middle-class families as the reason students struggle in overcoming obstacles. As stated earlier, I do
believe having a grasp of normative capital is important as a way to gain an understanding of normative structures and to develop an anti-deficit mindset.

**Implications for Practice and Future Research**

How the story is told is crucial to resilience but so too is a deeper understanding of systems of power and oppression, one that moves beyond just identifying these systems, which too often led the students to comparisons. At every turn, students perceived their role in systems of oppression as deficient, often even in the seeking of assistance. They were aware that, as Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) stated, the first step in seeking help from socialization agents is “the perception and assessment of the problem and their need for outside aid” (p. 238). Under these circumstances, students may only see their differences when developing this help-seeking behavior. They may carry this perception of deficiency with them unless and until they begin to understand how to challenge the dominant narrative. This is can be true of their institutions as well. “It is generally accepted that if postsecondary institutions have high persistence and graduation rates, they are effective institutions; if they don’t, they aren’t” (Garcia, 2019, p. 47).

**University Administration**

It is altogether too easy for university leaders to look at White normative outcomes and decide they are doing well by all students if the students graduate, but not to probe how those students made it through. Two of the participants in this study had already graduated and the rest were confident that they would as well, yet all struggled with lacking a sense of thriving during several points of their college careers. It is therefore likely that leaders of the institutions that graduate these students, and many others in similar situations, may not ascertain or investigate the issues faced by these and similar students.
Creating *intentional* opportunities to understand social contexts can lead to critically conscious resilience. I stress intentionality because “the development of identity for someone from an oppressed group adds a more complex developmental task” (Torres et al., 2019, p. 30). For students with minoritized identities, understanding how their identities influence the obstacles they face, the capital they have to navigate these obstacles, and the community cultural wealth they can leverage to succeed can be difficult while also focusing on their studies. This can be compounded if the student affairs professionals, faculty, or university therapists who are supposed to help students are not trained to understand the barriers they face, the hidden capital their peers have, or how their social identities are perceived in society. As stated by Stanton-Salazar (2011), if institutional agents are “void of ‘critical consciousness,’ adult actors may become quite devoted to providing ‘institutional support’ to low-status youth as a means of enabling them to uncritically assimilate into the *status quo*” (p. 1090). Extending this research might confirm what specific gains students obtain from conversations focused on social identities and their influence on resilience and thriving.

**Student Affairs**

A recognition that students’ social identities can influence resilience is fundamental to working with Latinx/a/o students, but beyond that it is imperative that Latinx/a/o students know that thriving can also be affected by how they perceive and challenge the majoritarian narrative of their peers as normative. Some students found their way to this understanding on their own but more often than not they sought out places and people to have social justice focused conversations that enabled them to obtain information and process their ideas. Yosso et al. (2009) and Torres and colleagues (2019) both shared important recommendations with regard to
navigating campus climate and identity development, respectively, which is the significance of
counterspaces for students to make meaning of the negative images and dissonant experiences
they have in college. It was clear that not thriving transmitted a sense of urgency as much as not
completing the goal of being resilient in college, but that urgency also arrested development in
some cases. Using the subfinding of goal setting or adapting in understanding thriving should be
further investigated as it can be leveraged in academic affairs practices.

Students were more likely to challenge racism rather than just be aware of it when
recounting testimonios or consejos, likely because they were not passively recounting in the
same way as with cuentos. Testimonios have been used to encourage a different understanding of
who we are and how we know. Consejos might play a similar a role for students with minoritized
identities but may be a way to center an action-oriented response. More research on the impact of
consejos on identity development and resilience should be conducted to understand whether
consejos act as a catalyst in challenging dominant ideology in relation to resilience and thriving.

Study Evaluation

The objective of this study was to share the lived experiences of Latinx/a/o college
students and in doing so to validate their experiences as meaningful (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As
previously stated, in evaluating the study, the findings should not be seen as generalizable given
the nature of the paradigms, frameworks, and methodology employed. These experiences can
only account for a small number of possible experiences. Again, in doing research like this I
hope the understanding of resilience will be extended to include the experiences of students with
minoritized identities and the variation of those experiences. Yet, there are two aspects of this
research I contemplated while conducting the study, one was interpretation and the other was vulnerability.

**What is Said**

During the interview with Abigail, she told a story about her godfather being deported. I remember that portion of the conversation vividly because she told the story in such a way that I could imagine her, as a child, delivering the terrible news that instead of being released from jail, he would be deported, and the shock she described from her family. It was not until I listened to the interview for the first time that I realized she kept referring to him as her godfather and I referred to him as her uncle. Limitations can take many forms and the interpretation of data is certainly one form. When she said godfather, I heard uncle because in my experience my padrinos (godfathers) and madrinas (godmothers) were all uncles and aunts. In sharing social identities with the participants, I was aware that I might conflate our experiences because of the things we had in common and was attentive to this possibility. Yet, there was the glaring evidence that I had done exactly what I did not want to do.

I believe that ultimately this commonality served as a benefit in creating trust rather than a hindrance, especially given the engagement in member reflection. When I wrote to Abigail to share her narrative, I acknowledged and apologized for conflating our experiences. I also told her that this is a tension that exists in qualitative research, because sometimes researchers hear other people’s stories and feel a connection to their story and transpose their own ideas, memories, or experiences to them. I also scrutinized the transcripts and my notes thoroughly after recognizing that mix-up. I listened more closely to participants’ words and often found myself questioning
my interpretation of their words. This led to decision fatigue at times, but I believe this
interrogation made for a more rigorous study.

What is Unsaid

When I interviewed Alex, something completely different happened. As he was telling
me about a conversation he had recently with his parents, he stopped short and said he did not
recall what they were talking about. This may have been the case, but it may also have been the
case that he stopped short because he actually did not want to share that part of the story. The
rest of the story related how he and his sister told his parents that their parents were not paying
for their college education because they had both received dreamer scholarships and then outside
scholarships to allow them to live on campus. Through tears, his mother reminded him of all
their sacrifices for them to have these opportunities.

I remember one time, me and my parents got in an argument because they weren’t . . .
I’m not sure how it started. But I think I ended up me and my sister ended up saying,
Well, you know, you’re not paying for any of our college education. So and then my mom
took that the wrong way. And she was . . . through tears, she was, she basically said, you
know, like, no sabes los sacrificios que hemos hecho para uds [you don’t know the
sacrifices we’ve made for you]. And I kind of realized, you know, like, a lot of it is my
own hard work. But it wasn’t just me who got myself to this point, like, it was my
parents, my counselors, the teachers that wrote letters for me.

I wondered if he was embarrassed for saying something to his mother that would be
viewed as insensitive by anyone interviewing him, but perhaps would be harder to admit to
another mother and a Latina, para el colmo (to boot). I had to recognize that sometimes my
shared identity might have been a hindrance in this regard. In this case there was not much I
could do. I could follow up with other questions, but if a student did not answer them or answer
them honestly there was not much I could do.
Data Diffraction

In working with two divergent paradigms and in partitioning the narratives by themes, I was reminded of the critique about integrating mixed methods data and the threat of data diffraction. “Diffraction pays attention to the ways in which data produced through different methods can both splinter and interrupt the object of study” (Uprichard & Dawney, 2019, p. 1). Uprichard and Dawney (2019) went on to explain how this disruption can be caused by “the ontological complexity of the object of the study as much as the epistemological or methodological issues intrinsic to the overall research design” (p. 4). It was with this idea in mind that I thought I would mitigate the diffraction by writing holistic, three-dimensional narratives, but I understand now that there may have been no escaping this given the nature of the first two issues outlined here. Putting together a whole narrative made up of fragmented pieces can still create a portrait that overlooks or mistakes the meaning making made by the student in favor of that made by the researcher.

Sample Size and Type

Finally, although I do not believe that this research reflects a generalizable truth, I want to acknowledge that this study can only provide a small understanding of these concepts because of the size and type of sample. I used intensity sampling to gain insight into resilience under very specific conditions; that is, the effect of students’ awareness of power structures on their ability to overcome obstacles. Therefore, students had to have an understanding of systems of power, which narrowed the experience of students significantly. Had this been an exploratory study, the sample should have been both larger and broader in type. In other words, in order to understand these concepts across a broader range of experience, one would need to use random sampling
and have a larger sample size to see the varying patterns in experience. This is another recommendation for future research.

**Trustworthiness**

I would like to reiterate that the goal of this research was to not to “get it right” but instead to get it “differently contoured and nuanced” (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018, p. 818). I cannot claim validity in this research as I do not believe in a single truth (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018). My aim was never to claim that my meaning making was the only possible way to understand the data and I maintain that this is simply one viable understanding of resilience based on the literature review, data gathered, and analysis employed (Chase, 2018). My objective was to be methodical, diligent, and meticulous in the process of collecting and analyzing data in order to augment credibility that this study is one possible way to understand resilience.

To that end, I followed through on my research plan in recruiting students who had a resilience and critical consciousness story to tell and were involved in academic and social counterspaces on their campuses. I provided students with consent forms (Appendix F), interview descriptions and preparation materials, counseling resources (Appendix G), and eventually their transcripts and three-dimensional narratives. I kept a researcher journal, but more than that I genuinely engaged in vulnerable reflection.

**Conclusion and Reflection**

When I began this research, and much earlier than that, I had constructed my own resilience narrative around the idea of resistance. It is the reason that Gloria Anzaldúa’s Shadow-Beast analogy resonated so deeply with me. It epitomized the idea of resisting the perceptions
others had of me and my abilities. For so long I thought of this as my story, even when my practice did not revolve around proving others wrong. It was not until conducting this study that I acknowledged that my resilience narrative had much more to do with self-concept and a growth mindset. These were concepts I introduced and implemented with my own children and incorporated into my daily practice and mantras, but I hung on to the Shadow-Beast narrative. I still returned to others’ perceptions of me despite my daily practices when faced with new challenges. The idea that new experiences could send a person back to a baseline of his or her resilience was further demonstrated when I sent Ana her resilience narrative and asked how graduate school was going. She replied pretty quickly that being in this program was proving to a be a challenge that she had not expected. Ana was struggling again.

Focusing on resistance rather than a growth mindset or self-concept is form of optimal response and one that appears to work for the purposes of resilience, although not necessarily for resilience growth. In other words, overcoming an obstacle and returning to a baseline can be accomplished through resistance but thriving, or growth from obstacles, requires much more nuance. How I have told my story in the past made it easy to return to that narrative when faced with new challenges but as an optimal response it might not always lead to thriving. I have a new story to tell, one that I have told my children before and can now declare as my own. This consejo is about not comparing yourself to others or their journey and creating a self-concept that is founded on an internal formula of yourself. It is also a reminder that stumbling is quite possibly a requirement of acquiring new knowledge or facing any new challenge—you should expect it and remember that you have stumbled before and can do more than recover, you can grow.
APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO LATINX/A/O ORGANIZATION AND ACADEMIC UNITS
Hello,

My name is Norma López and I am a doctoral student at Loyola University Chicago’s Graduate School of Education. I am writing to request your help in conducting dissertation research about how Latinx/a/o students develop resilience (defined as a person’s ability to overcome obstacles and grow from these experiences) and how their understanding of identity as a Latinx/a/o student contributes to its development, if at all. My study specifically focuses on self-identified Latinx/a/o students, who are the first in their family to attend college. The specific criteria are:

1. College student, any grade level but over 18
2. Self-identify as Latinx/a/o
3. First-generation to college
4. Have an awareness of systems of power and oppression as it relates to race and ethnicity.

If you feel comfortable, would you forward the recruitment email below to students in your organization/academic unit? If you have questions or need clarification before sending, please feel free to contact me via email or calling me at 312-590-6335. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Demetri Morgan at dmorgan6@luc.edu.

Best,

Norma

Norma López
Doctoral Student/Research Assistant
Higher Education Program
Loyola University Chicago
M: 312-590-6335
Nlopez12@luc.edu
APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO STUDENTS
Hello,

My name is Norma López and I am a doctoral student at Loyola University Chicago’s Graduate School of Education. I am contacting you because you seem to be an ideal candidate to participate in a study I am doing about the ways that students develop resilience (defined as a person’s ability to overcome obstacles and grow from these experiences) and how your understanding of identity as a Latinx/a/o student contributes to its development, if at all. My study specifically focuses on self-identified Latinx/a/o students, who are the first in their family to attend college, and 18 years of age or older. If you have had a sibling attend that is fine. If one or both parents/guardians attended but never finished, that is fine as well. The specific criteria are:

1. College student, any grade level but over 18 years of age
2. Self-identify as Latinx/a/o
3. First-generation to college
4. Self-identify as having an awareness of systems of power and oppression as it relates to race and ethnicity

I am writing in the hope that you will agree to participate in my study. I will briefly outline what this entails.

- I will email you a consent form, as is required for research involving human subjects.
- If you consent, we will schedule an approximately 60-75-minute interview to be held via an in-person meeting, video conference, or phone call (based on your preference) at a mutually agreed upon time.
- If you agree, I would like to record the interview so that I may focus on understanding your responses, but you may opt out of being recorded in the consent form.
- Questions will focus on your stories/cuentos, advice/consejos, and testimonies/testimonios of resilience. I will send an explanation of these terms that should help you prepare for the interviews.

If you choose to participate, you will receive monetary compensation at the end of the interview in the form of a $25 Visa gift card. Please know that your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to leave the study at any time. Your identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym, of your choosing, will be used in order to protect your privacy.

I understand that you are very busy, so your participation is greatly appreciated. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. If you know other students who fit these criteria and might be interested, please feel free to forward this letter. Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,

Norma López

Doctoral Student/Research Assistant
Higher Education Program
Loyola University Chicago
M: 312-590-6335
Nlopez12@luc.edu
APPENDIX C

EXPLANATION OF TERMS AND PREPARATION: CUENTOS, CONSEJOS, TESTIMONIOS
Please reflect for a few minutes about your life, early years through present, especially focused on getting to college and your experience there. Consider how systems of power or racism have affected the challenges you faced and how you have been resilient in these situations. Decide what stories from each category below you will share in the interview and, if it helps, write a few notes to remember these.

1. Reflect on stories/cuentos told about your or your family, by you or your family, that have influenced this process. These might be stories that are told often or stories that you know but are not spoken. Contemplate what has been challenging in this process and how you have persisted in getting to college. How have these stories helped or been part of your journey in other ways. You will briefly share 1-2 cuentos you see as relevant during the interview.

2. Now, consider advice/consejos you have received about this process. This advice does not have to be specific for example about how to write an essay for your college application. It can be any advice that has affected your ability to get to college or in overcoming other challenges that may not seem related to college, but you connect to it. You will briefly share 1-2 consejos you see as relevant.

3. Lastly, share a testimony/testimonio of your resilience while in college or in getting to college? How have you observed the emergence of your critical consciousness? And how has that critical consciousness shaped your resilience, if at all? This might be the moment you acknowledged yourself as resilient or having an awareness of power structures that personally affected you. You will share 1 testimonio for each, resilience and critical consciousness, or 1 if you see these as combined.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Introduction to Researchers

- Before interview

  
  - Email “Informed Consent Form” and explanation of terms and preparation information

Script to be read before each interview:

Hello, my name is Norma Lopez and I am a doctoral student in the higher education program at Loyola University Chicago (LUC). I am working on this research project for my dissertation proposal. This research project is seeking to explore how first-generation to college, Latinx/a/o, students make meaning of their ability to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity, in other words, how have they constructed their resilience narrative? How does a critical consciousness, or understanding their social identity within the context of social, political and economic forms of oppression, influence their resilience narrative, if at all?

As I mentioned in our email exchange, I will be recording this interview. Is that still acceptable? The interview should take about 60-75 minutes. Neither your name nor any identifying information will be used in any written material. If at any time during this interview, you wish to end the conversation, please let me know. Please tell me what pseudonym you have chosen?

I would like to give you a sense of how the interview will go. I will begin with general questions about your background and how you ended up at your current university. Then move on to having you share your cuento(s), consejo(s), and testimonio(s). After each story I will ask a few questions. Some will be the same after each story and others will be clarifying questions and will vary. To be clear, there are no right or wrong answers, the interview goal is to understand your lived experience and should feel like a conversation.

If you experience emotional or psychological discomfort in recounting these stories, the number for the counseling department on your campus is (fill in for each student’s campus).

**Interview Questions**

1. Tell me a little about yourself, your family, your upbringing? Are there any particular family hardships you faced growing up?

2. How did you end up at your current college? Who or what helped you in accomplishing this?

**After each story/consejo/testimonio**
3. Why did you choose this story?

4. What significance has it had in your resilience? Or in your ability to recognize systems of oppression?

5. Who played an important role in this story? How?

6. Do you have anything else to add?

**Notes for interviewer**

During the interview, the interviewer should listen for and follow up on statements that reflect changes in ability to persist, the participant’s response to and growth from challenging situations, as well as reliance on social networks, including familial ties, and optimal responses. Religion and faith may also play a role, as well as critical hope that recognizes the barriers but maintains an optimistic outlook.
APPENDIX E

RESEARCHER REFLEXIVE JOURNAL
Label each with the date and include any thoughts or reflections that have occurred to you after the interview. Include any thoughts or reflections on the process. How you feel about the memories or thoughts these interviews evoke. Additionally, use this space to distinguish your thoughts, memories, and feelings from those of the participants, specifically when it appears that your experiences feel similar.

Below is an example.

1/3/19

Follow-up – I remembered that growing up my family used their home as a way station to family or friends when they arrived in this country. Once they were settled in a job, which my parents helped them get, they would move on. This meant we grew up with lots of family growing up. This contributed to overcoming obstacles in the following ways.

Process – I have realized I haven’t thought about some of this in a very long time. This makes me feel x, y, z.

Distinguishing factors – When the participant spoke about their family housing relatives, it reminded me of my own family’s values. But the difference in how we viewed this similar experience was vast. I viewed it as helpful in overcoming obstacles because I could go to different people for different needs. The participant felt differently in the following ways.
APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: The Shadow-Beast: The Influence of Critical Consciousness on Resilience Narratives of Latinx/a/o College Students
Researcher(s): Norma López
Faculty Sponsor: Demetri Morgan & Aurora Chang

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Norma López for dissertation research under the supervision of Dra. Aurora Chang and Dr. Demetri Morgan in the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you are a college student who identifies as Latinx/a/o and the first in your family to attend college.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore how first-generation to college, Latinx/a/o, students make meaning of their ability to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity, in other words, how have they constructed their resilience narrative? How does a critical consciousness, or understanding their social identity within the context of social, political and economic forms of oppression, influence their resilience narrative, if at all?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:

*Participate in a 60-75 minute interview. You will receive specific information via email about how to prepare prior to the interview. You will be asked to relate your experiences in overcoming obstacles, specifically in overcoming obstacles to achieve academic goals but also in your personal life, by sharing stories, advice, and testimonies about your resilience. Time will be mutually agreed upon and interviews will be conducted via phone call, video conference, or in person. You will be emailed to schedule this interview. If you consent, the interview will be voice recorded to obtain highly accurate transcriptions of the interview. If you would like to participate in the interview but not be recorded, please check the box below.

☐ Yes, I agree to audio recording
☐ No, I do not agree to audio recording

Risks/Benefits:
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. You may experience some emotional discomfort as you recount struggles you faced and how you dealt with them. While there are no direct benefits to participants, I hope results will provide insight on how to support students with minoritized identities through their academic journey, particularly as it involves overcoming stressors in their life so they may persist in college.

**Compensation:**

For your participation you will receive a monetary compensation after the interview in the form of a $25 Visa gift card.

**Confidentiality:**

During the interview, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym to be used for all written material. Once your interview is matched to your pseudonym, all references to your information will be using this pseudonym. All transcripts of interviews, documents, notes, and audio recordings will be saved in a secure location and on a password protected computer. Access to files will be restricted and only used for research purposes. Anonymous data from this study will be analyzed and reported to the dissertation committee, Dra. Aurora Chang, Dr. Demetri Morgan, Dr. Leanne Kallemeen, and Dr. Ebelia Hernández.

Audio-recordings, real names, and contact information will be destroyed upon completion of the research. Consent forms will be stored separately from the data and kept indefinitely as per Loyola’s policy. Transcripts, using pseudonyms only, will be stored separately as well and kept for 10 years.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Norma López at nlopez12@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor Demetri Morgan at dmorgan6@luc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Signature</td>
<td>Date</td>
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APPENDIX G

COUNSELING RESOURCES
The Family Institute at Northwestern University
https://www.family-institute.org/request-appointment
847-733-4300

Student Health and Wellness at Williams College
https://health.williams.edu/schedule/
413.597.2206

Wellness Center at Loyola University Chicago
https://www.luc.edu/wellness/mentalhealth/appointmentsfirststeps/
773-508-2530
REFERENCE LIST


VITA

Dr. López was raised in Chicago, the daughter of undocumented, Mexican-born parents. She attended public schools in Chicago, fulfilling her immigrant parents’ dream of obtaining an education, as they had not finished elementary school. Once the family learned there were other opportunities beyond a secondary education, they set their goals higher. Dr. López graduated from Benito Juarez High School and went on to attend Williams College where she completed a bachelor of arts in history. Dr. López discovered her love of higher education in her first job after college as an admissions counselor, after which she earned a master of education from Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education.

Subsequently, Dr. López turned her attention to growing her professional experience in higher education. She worked in programming and financial aid while living in Boston, before returning to her alma mater as assistant dean of the college. She eventually made her way back to Chicago and worked at the University of Chicago for 8 years in admissions, academic advising, and residential life. She eventually moved into a role in a college access program based in a Chicago public high school. It was at this moment that Dr. López, longing for more time to learn about and process various social and educational inequities, made the decision to enter the PhD program at Loyola University of Chicago, where she earned her doctorate.

Dr. López’s research is focused on the influence of critical consciousness on the resilience narratives of Latinx/a/o college students. She has also been outspoken about juggling parenting with her career and is currently working on research about navigating graduate school
and academia as a woman and mother. Finally, Dr. López is investigating innovative research methods rooted in LatCrit theory.