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Ecological Factors Promoting Academic Resilience of Latina Students

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ECOLOGICAL FACTORS PROMOTING ACADEMIC RESILIENCE
OF LATINA STUDENTS

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

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY

REBECCA TESTA-RYAN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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ABSTRACT

To enhance the academic success of Latina students, researchers and educators must move away from focusing on deficits and risks and concentrate more on student potential and environmental support, which have been found to successfully open pathways to academic achievement. By shifting the focus, stakeholders can gain an understanding of the educational experiences of Latina students considered on a pathway of educational failure and the processes that can contribute instead to their academic resilience. In this qualitative study, I investigate the ecological factors that influence and impact the academic resiliency of Latina students. Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory of Human Development serves as the theoretical framework. Focusing on in-depth interviews with six high school seniors and six social support providers, I examine the perceptions and experiences of these seniors, and will reveal how each of the ecological systems helped foster pathways of resiliency. This qualitative study also fills the research gaps in the fields of Latina youth, academic resiliency and educational achievement with the goal to distinguish methods that *support* resiliency rather than limit the focus to identifying characteristics of resilient children. Implications include how educators can cultivate academic environments that nurture the resiliency of Latina students.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this introductory chapter, I outline the premise of my dissertation focused on the resilience of Latina high school students. Although scholars have not agreed upon a definition of resilience, there is general consensus in the literature that resilience is the result of an interaction between a person and his or her environment (Allan &Ungar, 2014).

I define resilience as the internal factors and processes students need in order to overcome adversity. Furthermore, I subscribe to the expanded vision of the community of resilience researchers, who base their work on the premise that resilience can be developed and fostered through social supports and nurturing individuals. Therefore, resilience is created through ecological pathways. This study uses the ecological framework to understand the processes that facilitated the ability of Latina students to overcome adversity.

In this chapter, I discuss the struggles Latina¹ students face in public education; provide national data that demonstrate the achievement gaps between Latina and non-Latina students' standardized test scores, and review and assess essential ecological factors that foster the development of academic resilience in Latina students. I begin with

¹I use the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" interchangeably. Furthermore, as outlined and defined by the Pew Hispanic Center, the terms "whites," "blacks," and "Asians" include both the Hispanic and the non-Hispanic components of their populations.

a statement of the research problem.

Statement of the Problem

Historical records since the 16th century indicate that Latinas have had a continuous presence in the United States (U.S.) territory, making them the first, non-Native American group to immigrate to the newly developing nation. As such, they have lived in the U.S. much longer than all other immigrant ethnic groups (Leonard, 2009). Latinas, however, continue to face disadvantages in terms of educational attainment and socioeconomic status (SES) as demonstrated by the low academic achievement levels of urban students of color (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). Latina students often begin their academic experience with disadvantages, such as poverty, single-parent homes, immigration issues, and violence (Dolan, 2009). Although educational challenges are common to almost all ethnic groups in the country, Latinas have been among the most affected due to insufficient services from the government and the nation's system of education (Dolan, 2009). For example, as a result of "tracking" policies based on the personal perceptions of Latina students by teachers and administrators, these young women are infrequently placed in college preparatory courses (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). This often leads to misidentification and misplacement of Latina students as primarily English language learners (ELLs), and fewer opportunities being made available to them (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012) to expand their academic potential.

These limitations have resulted in overwhelming academic and social gaps between the educational success of low-income Latina students and white middle-class students in the country (Dolan, 2009). In Dolan's study, academic success refers to the achievement of all of the following academic markers: a cumulative high school GPA of

2.75 or higher, on a 4.0 scale; earning a composite score of 16 or higher on the American College Testing, or a minimum combined Scholastic Aptitude Test score of 790; graduating from high school on time, and enrolling in college or a university. SES factors often reflect the disparities between the identified populations, and the racial “achievement gap” in education remains one of the critical areas of great concern when it comes to education (Noguera & Wang, 2006, p. 12).

The Challenge of Raising Academic Achievement

Urban public schools in the U.S. are challenged with raising the academic achievement of Latina students in an environment characterized by poverty, inequitable schools, lack of English-language acquisition, limited economic prospects, and unstable immigration status. However, regardless of the difficulties, the traditional culture and nature of the Latino people provide a strong sense of unity. This cohesion is expressed by their sense of community, manifested through healthy and strong family (*familia*) traditions with a productive network of resources. Their commitment to support each other, along with their ability to devise resources if necessary, is part of the support system which can impact the future of Latino families and their distinctive academic goals.

The U.S. has one of the highest dropout rates of any industrialized nation, which has led to the country’s inability to compete economically with like-nations (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). According to 2012 U.S. Census Bureau, for the first time in American history, half (49.9%) of American children under the age of five belong to a non-White, minority group. As a result, the school enrollment of Latino children has rapidly grown, increasing almost two-fold between the years 1990 and 2006. This represents

approximately 60% of the overall increase in the enrollment in all public schools for the cited period of time (Fry & Gonzales, 2008).

The relationship between being a minority student from a low-SES background and low levels of academic achievement has been one of the most consistently examined and established phenomena in the fields of sociology, psychology, and education (Roche & Ungar, 2012). In 2012, approximately 21.4% of the total Hispanic population lived in poverty compared to only about 7.8% of their White counterparts throughout the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2014). Evaluations of race, SES, and academic achievement have demonstrated that minority students drawn from mostly low-SES backgrounds are far less likely to achieve at higher levels, as compared with their white peers drawn from higher-SES backgrounds (NCES, 2009).

Persistent differences in achievement emerge early on in the schooling process for Latina and other minority students. Measures released by the NCES (2008) show three groups of people lagging behind by two academic years by the time they reach the fourth grade—low-income earners, African-Americans, and Latinas. Unfortunately, the same groups of students have been found to lag behind their white counterparts by three to four academic years by the time they reach 8th and 12th grade respectively (NCES, 2008). Furthermore, an estimated 22.3% of Latinas do not complete high school (Noguera & Wang, 2006). The number of Latinas dropping out of school is more than double that of African-American students and triple of White students (Noguera & Wang, 2006).

Seeking Federal Government Support

Federal support exemplifies the outermost layer of the ecological model. Environmental change is included in this level, as it is often determined by policy

decisions that affect all citizens of this country. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2009) present significant proposals deemed essential for the Obama administration to support in order to address the educational disparities and issues impacting Latino students. The Suarez-Orozco study offers the current administration specific recommendations: (1) increased opportunities for preschool education, (2) improved teacher training, (3) restructured language education, (4) increased after-school programs, (5) support of community mentorship programs, and (6) development of college-pathway information. Contreras (2011) concluded through her investigation of various research findings that academic support of Latino students is an ongoing process that is needed at all stages, not just at particular instances in the academic experience.

In 2010, the Obama White House renewed the Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Students, which was first established in 1990 by then-President George H.W. Bush to address the economic disparities faced by Hispanic students. The announced goals of the renewed initiative are to close the achievement gap, develop educational opportunity, and enhance the academic achievement of Latino students (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a; U.S. Department of Education, 2011b). The White House Initiative recommended: (1) increasing access to culturally-and linguistically-appropriate educational services, (2) including parent-education instruction, (3) employing bilingual teachers and administrators with backgrounds in Urban Education, (4) advocating early childhood programs, (5) fostering parent involvement, and (6) increasing educational services to full-day programming.

President Obama's initiatives affirm that new methods of teaching and learning are vital, including preparing teachers; supporting Latino-serving institutions, and

ameliorating the cost of college (U.S. Department of Education, 2011c). It is evident that these recommendations acknowledge the issues impeding the educational success of Latino students.

Searching for Methods to Close the Gaps

Amid the struggle to raise academic achievement for all students, educational leaders have continued their search for methods to close the achievement gaps (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006). However, there is limited, research-based scholarship about U.S. Latino adolescents focusing on additional areas besides the deficits and challenges that they can face, such as substance use and school dropout rates (Acevedo & Gering, 2011). Therefore, efforts must be made to address the underrepresentation of asset-based empirical literature among Latino youth, an approach that is consistent with the emphasis of social justice (and on the strengths of individuals) (López, 2006). Not only is the inclusion of asset variables into the study of U.S. Latino youth likely to result in more effective approaches to the prevention of adverse outcomes, it can also clarify conceptual models traditionally used to understand these youth (Kuperminc et al., 2009). The absence of empirical data about the positive development of Latino youth will have devastating effects, not only for the field of education, but also for the U.S. economy. Furthering the academic goals beyond secondary school for Latino students will increase the likelihood of a productive demographic group of citizens who will contribute to society. Therefore, it is necessary to establish successful pathways towards college education for Latino students.

The Pew Hispanic Center (2012) found an increase in Latino college attendance, with the majority enrolling in community colleges. Among 18- to 24-year old Latinos,

who had completed high school, college enrollment rates continued their increased progression in 2012. According to the Census Bureau, 49% of young Hispanic high school graduates were enrolled in college in 2012. By comparison, 47% of white, non-Hispanic high school graduates were enrolled in college. Furthermore, the study reported that although the percentage of current Hispanic high school graduates enrolled in college has surpassed that of whites, the same is not true among all young people ages 18 to 24. The percentage of all Hispanics ages 18 to 24 in college lags behind that of all whites in the same age group—37.5% among Hispanics compared with 42.1% among whites because Hispanics have a higher high school dropout rate than whites (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). Nonetheless, these numbers signify a significant change among the growing Latino population in the United States, and reinforce the value of a deeper examination of the Latino education experience and the factors fostering their academic resilience.

Factors that Influence Resilience

According to Brooks (2006), *resilience* can be defined as children accomplishing their aspirations, despite being considered at-risk due to disadvantages over which children have no control. Resilience is influenced by environmental and personal factors referred to as *protective factors*² that serve as buffers to adversity. According to Rutter (2012), the more protective factors an individual possesses the greater the likelihood that the individual will be able to persevere through life's stressors. There are internal and

²According to Benard (2004), protective factors are the conditions, traits and situations which change or completely reverse outcomes that are potentially destructive and promote resilience, optimal development, and academic success.

external protective factors that function collectively to make children more resilient. The *internal* factors include: (1) strong work ethic, (2) perseverance, (3) high self-esteem, (4) internal locus of control, and (5) well-defined goals and aspirations. The *external* factors include: (1) caring personnel, (2) high parental expectations, (3) high expectations from professionals, and (4) strong peer and community support.

Gaining an understanding of protective factors is essential for every student. It is particularly important for Latino students who form part of the fastest-growing population of students in the country (Kuperminc et al., 2009). However, a major challenge is that 22% of the youth population of Latinas has experienced developmental deficits (Kuperminc et al., 2009). Although educators can identify social and environmental stressors that place Latina students *at-risk* based on outside factors, the lack of research addressing recommendations for dealing with these stressors leaves researchers, policymakers, and educators without solutions for preventing negative outcomes for these young women.

Research about Latinas considered at-risk has been the topic of many research studies. However, I contend that the study of Latinas from an asset-based perspective is likely to result in the development of more effective approaches to the understanding and prevention of adverse outcomes. Asset-based perspectives of Latina can expand the understanding of academic resilience among the entire Latino population. The prevention of such outcomes in youth is most effective when focused on psychosocial variables associated with successful development.

Resilience is a dual construct that includes exposure to risk factors and manifestation of positive adjustment (Masten, 2010). Latinas are often exposed to the

disadvantages in urban cities where these risks are ongoing throughout their lives.

Traditionally, the focus has been on the students' weaknesses instead of the numerous strengths, or *funds of knowledge*, that they possess (Kuperminc et al., 2009; Moll & Gonzalez, 1999). Latino culture contains rich cultural and cognitive resources that should be utilized in their classrooms in order to provide culturally responsive and meaningful lessons that tap students' prior knowledge. Information that teachers learn about their students in this process is considered the students' funds of knowledge. The construct of *funds of knowledge* presents one way to help all stakeholders connect with a student and with her family.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of all teachers to attempt to learn something unique about each student they teach. By doing so, researchers and educators will obtain the knowledge and means necessary to create environments that encourage Latina students to reach their fullest potential.

Nurturing and Developing Resilience

According to Kuperminc et al. (2009), the basic goal is to foster developmentally appropriate environments for Latina youth, with the capacity to embrace their unique cultural strengths in ways that foster intervention and open a path to academic resilience. Current research views resilience³ not as a predetermined attribute but one that can be nurtured and developed over time (Rutter, 2012). In accordance, scholars emphasize developing resilience through addressing the interaction between the concerned

³According to Combrinck-Graham (2013), resilience is a quality that allows juveniles exposed to significant stress and adversity to avoid succumbing to school failure, substance abuse, mental health problems, and juvenile delinquency.

individual and the environment, and between deficits and protective factors. Furthermore, research reveals that resilience is not a personality trait, but rather it is the ability to shift the focus from individual protective *factors* to protective *processes* (Masten, 2010). This line of research acknowledges that resilience not only resides within the individual, but also among family, peer networks, and within the broader school and community environments.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this qualitative study (Yin, 2009) is to investigate the ecological factors that positively foster Latina students' ability to become academically resilient. To increase the academic success of Latina students, researchers and educators must move away from focusing on deficits and risks to focusing more on strengths and resilience (Morales & Trotman, 2005). By doing so, educators can gain an understanding of the educational experience of Latina students considered to be on a path of educational failure and the *processes* that contribute to their academic resilience. This qualitative research study will assist in this important endeavor by contributing to the insufficient body of literature regarding (1) Latinas, (2) academic resilience, (3) educational achievement, and will (4) identify ecological factors and *processes* that will nurture resilience within Latina students.

Research Questions

This research aims to identify the ecological and environmental factors and processes that foster academic resilience. Understanding these components can help create effective educational policies and facilitate the adoption of initiatives to support Latina students. Such a focus can contribute to the important collaborative efforts of

school, community, and family at the level of public educational policy. This dissertation focuses on the following questions:

- (1) How do ecological factors influence the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?
- (2) What do social support providers believe is critical for the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?

Definitions

Academic resilience: “The process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding” (Morales & Trotman, 2005, p. 8). For the purpose of this study, educational resilience and academic resilience will be used interchangeably to refer to the same concept, as they have been in previous studies. Academic success is determined by aspirations of college-bound Latina students.

At-risk Protective factors: Traits, conditions, and situations that alter or reverse potentially destructive outcomes and promote optimal development, resilience, and academic success (Werner & Brentano, 2012).

Risk factors: A quality that allows youth exposed to significant stress and adversity to avoid succumbing to school failure, substance abuse, mental health problems, and juvenile delinquency (Morales, 2008).

Socioeconomic status: “Is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, education, and occupation. Socioeconomic status is typically broken into three categories, high SES, middle SES, and low SES to

describe the three areas a family or an individual may fall into” (NCES, 2007). A family’s economic and social position is in relation to the surrounding society (Morales, 2008).

Significance of the Study

The data collected for this study will offer insights into and understanding of the adversities faced by Latina students as they strive for academic success in high school. Latinas recently surpassed African-Americans as the majority student population in the Chicago Public Schools. This provides new opportunities for Chicago educators given the fact that Latinas face unique challenges relative to other ethnic groups in that public school system. It is very important that cultural aspects be given preeminence when it comes to issues of education (Hopkins, 2004) because cultural issues have been documented to play a significant role in shaping the academic outcomes of Latinas.

A few of the common traits notable in Latino culture include maintaining close family bonds as well as cultural and religious traditions, while continuing to strive for self-improvement and the improvement of the family’s situation. These unique cultural experiences play a major role in the education of Latina students and have often been overlooked in research studies (Hopkins, 2004).

Nationwide, a totally new approach to education of this group is in order, especially in large urban centers, such as Chicago, where the total Latino student population has continued to grow (Lambert, 2003). Both a classroom-based approach and a school-based approach must be connected to address the educational challenges of Latinas. That is, instead of applying measures to improve the learning of Latina students at the classroom level, measures should be applied school-wide (Lambert, 2003). In that

way, more room is created for everyone in the school to play a role in enhancing the education attainability of students.

This study presents important information about the ecological factors that promote academic resilience among Latinas, making education attainable, as well as potentially pertinent information for all urban high schools with similar demographics.

In the field of education, it is imperative to understand why a significant segment of one of the largest minority groups in the nation, Latinas, is doing poorly in school when compared to other ethnic groups (Kuperminc et al., 2009). While the Latino population has been the focus of many studies, including those studies examining deficit characteristics, there continues to be a great need for research because Latina dropout rates remain the highest amongst all racial and ethnic groups. Educators need to be better equipped to understand what factors contribute to academic success (Gandara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2006). Additionally, all stakeholders need to be aware of the factors that enable students to develop academic resilience and feed their desire to seek higher education (Heineke, Coleman, Ferrell, & Kersemeier, 2012).

This dissertation has important implications for education and social policy, as well as for practical implementation. As researchers learn more about the ecological factors that contribute to Latina academic achievement, the information needs to be brought to the attention of policy makers to ensure that Latinas are able to develop academic resilience, increase their rate of high school graduation, and continue to increase their numbers in higher education. Through this study, it will be possible to understand these critical underlying factors impacting the education of Latinas and to offer insights into the possible resilience factors that contribute to Latino students'

academic success, regardless of the challenges they face. These findings may assist in developing alternative methods of ensuring equitable educational outcomes for Latina students in urban high schools while contributing to the literature regarding the role of schools in fostering resilience in Latina students.

In the current era of school reform, acquiring knowledge of the critical roles that teachers, school counselors, social workers, administrators, other educators, and policymakers play in strengthening the external protective factors that promote educational resilience in this population is particularly vital (Bryan, 2005; Heineke et al., 2012). By investigating how schools can foster greater resilience in ways that are meaningful and culturally relevant for Latina students in an urban setting, this study will assist multiple educational stakeholders in fostering a model of resilience that is inclusive of Latina students' experiences and addresses their specific needs.

Personal Connection to the Research Problem

My interest in the academic resilience of Latina students stems from my own experience as a resilient, Mexican-Panamanian woman. I had to overcome personal and educational obstacles and move through a variety of challenging events that could have resulted in poverty and academic underachievement. Nonetheless, I was able not only to graduate from college, but also to pursue post-graduate studies. As a Latina and educator, I also am cognizant of the culture-specific obstacles many Latinas face—from language to economic barriers—and must overcome in order to persevere and succeed academically. However, my interest in academically-successful Latina students is not just personal.

For the past 17 years, I have taught history to middle school Latino students. Daily, these students, especially the girls (Latinas), cope with adversity that is often too hard for even adults to fathom. Still, there are students who are able to utilize these ecological factors as the fuel for their academic achievement. In order to replicate that success and awaken and foster that potential in my own students, through my research, I have been seeking to understand what steps the academically-successful Latina students take to beat the odds and develop resilience in pursuit of their goals.

This study includes the role of the family, school administrators and teachers, as well as community resources, in fostering success across all student groups. Finally, this study will afford me the opportunity to listen to the experiences of academically-successful Latina students and directly learn from them the ecological factors they believe have fostered their achievements.

I believe that focusing on the reasons students fail will not foster resilient students, nor will it promote academic success among the Latina population. Instead, it is vital that we begin to examine ecological processes that support and nurture the resilience of Latina students to overcome environmental barriers and succeed in school and in their lives. As an educator and future policymaker, I believe the findings resulting from this work have the potential to contribute greatly to the body of information needed by educators, administrators and academics responsible for contact and/or interaction with this community, and can assure the academic resilience of future generations of Latina students. Consequently, this study examines the academic resilience of Latina students and the interactions among their surroundings using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. My dissertation study will fill a void in the research regarding how an

academically-oriented, ecological system influences the individual development of Latina students.

Conclusion

Based on current social issues and the limited, available literature, it is clear that the academic resilience of Latina youth is a vital issue that needs to be addressed. Research suggests that academic resilience is fostered by ecological practices or climates. This research study is designed to expand the body of research literature written about Latina students, education, and academic resilience by examining the role of ecological factors and processes in fostering academic resilience in low SES, urban Latina high school students.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. The two research questions are presented. Chapter II contains the theoretical framework, literature and research related to Ecological Systems Theory, including risk factors and protective processes, and an overview of the construct of resilience. Methodology for this study is presented in Chapter III and includes the research design, selection of the sample, data collections tasks, and data analysis procedures. Results of the data analysis are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V provides an in-depth analysis of the relationships between Ecological Systems Theory and academic resilience among Latina high school students.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter II, the researcher presents the theoretical constructs and extant literature relevant to the qualitative study of Latina students' academic resilience, beginning with a description of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that center on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. By using an ecological framework, the researcher aims to better understand the relationships among the family, school, and community that promote the academic resilience of urban, college-bound, Latina high school seniors who overcome adverse circumstances. The researcher then reviews the extant literature in the areas of resilience, risk, and protective factors of Latinas within an ecological system construct. Finally, this study evaluates implications for educational practices whose purpose is to ensure that Latina academic resilience is fostered in order to situate this study in the gaps in the existing literature.

Framing the Study with an Ecological Perspective

Theoretical Framework

The framework for my research on ecological pathways is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) epistemological perspective on the social sciences, which posits that certain requirements must be satisfied for optimum functioning of a society, with an emphasis on the roles of individuals and family units. His work has been instrumental in encouraging studies of student outcomes that incorporate the multiple and overlapping contexts through which students move on a daily basis.

When examining and evaluating the scholastic outcomes of students through an ecological framework, it is critical to look not only at the individual, but the multiple contexts (e.g., neighborhood, school, and classroom climates) that contribute to and influence student responses to environmental stimuli. From this perspective, healthy development occurs when behaviors are consistent with rules and social norms, and problems arise when behaviors are contrary to traditional norms and expectations.

The Ecological Systems Theory approach (1979) focuses on student's interaction with school personnel, parents, family members, community members, and representatives of community-based organizations, such as businesses, churches, libraries, and social service agencies (Hong, Cho, & Lee, 2010). Children are exposed to adverse outcomes when they are forced to live in places where they do not have the necessary resources to keep them there (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Ecological Systems Theory, therefore, attempts to explain and describe the relationship between the environment and individuals, as well as the resultant influence that this relationship has upon the individual's development.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work has been instrumental in encouraging the study of student outcomes situated within the multiple and overlapping contexts through which students move. According to the ecological theory of human development as put forth by Bronfenbrenner (1979):

Human development is the progressive, mutual accommodation between growing human beings and the changing settings in which they live and learn as this process is affected by relations both within and between immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 21)

In this way, he proposed differing levels of context, each of which can influence and interact with behavior and cognition. The *microsystem* is “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experiences by a developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features, and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality and systems of belief” (p. 22). The *mesosystem* is a series of microsystems that link the processes and outcomes between two or more settings, whereas the *macrosystem* is a large group that shares common characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Within each subsystem, adversities or risk factors might influence development in a negative way. By virtue of the existence and availability of the ecological model, researchers have been compelled to broaden their scope to include additional aspects that foster resilience. Academics are now pressed to look beyond individual characteristics and additionally focus on the external factors. Such external factors include the community, the school, and the family (Morales, 2008).

The application of the ecological framework is important in research pertaining to educational or academic resilience, as it provides an opportunity to explore and address environmental factors enhancing academic resilience and identify the characteristics of resilient individuals (Wang & Gordon, 2012). Latina students from low-SES urban environments, possessing academic resilience, have the ability to overcome environmental adversity and achieve academic success. However, research involving students who are academically resilient and succeed within the public school system has been rare, especially compared to the vast amount of research about the academic failure of students from racial minority and low-SES groups (Wang & Gordon, 2012).

Fortunately, recognition of the lack of knowledge about academic resilience has caused many to move away from focusing on deficit-factors and place more emphasis on the academic success of minority students. Previous studies have shown that although students enter high school with varying degrees of resilience related to individual and family characteristics, schools can and do play a role in fostering their academic achievement (Rivera & Waxman, 2007; Wang & Gordon, 2012). The most vital aim of the research on academic resilience is to gain an understanding of how ecological factors and processes promote Latina academic success, despite adversity, and an understanding of how these components can assist other Latina students facing the same circumstances in achieving the same degree of accomplishment (Wang & Gordon, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the researcher employs an ecological framework to explore the environmental factors that contribute to the development of educational resilience by Latina high school students. Numerous theories of student achievement discuss the importance of the social context relative to human behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Based on Ecological Systems Theory, the researcher uses the ecological conceptual framework to examine the interactive relationship between individuals and their social environment. Given the influence of multiple and overlapping environments, this framework posits that gaining an understanding of student behavior better equips educators to develop support systems and programs that are effective, efficient, and appropriate to student needs (Bronfenbrenner, 2009).

A vital aspect with regard to viewing behavior through ecological lenses is the ability to understand that the results are more suggestive (relative to viewing it through a

social lens) of the interactions between the targeted individuals and their surrounding environment. The alternative perspective addresses many criticisms of other frameworks, including the propensity to blame the student and a focus on characteristics over which one has no control (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). The conceptual model provides a useful roadmap for examination of the high school educational environments that foster the academic resilience of urban, Latina high school students, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

The most influential level (Weiss, 2010), the *microsystem* is the system closest to the student and the one with which he has direct contact (e.g., home, school). Relationships in a microsystem are bi-directional, such as family, peers, or caregivers, where the student's reaction to the people in the microsystem will affect how he is treated in return.

The *mesosystem* consists of the interactions between the different parts of a student's microsystem. Individual microsystems do not function independently, but are interconnected and assert influence upon one another. These interactions have an indirect impact on the individual (Weiss, 2010).

The *exosystem* refers to a setting in which a person is not an active participant but is still affected; this includes decisions that have bearing on the person, but the person does not participate in the decision-making process. An example would be a child being affected by a parent who receives a promotion at work or loses his job (Weiss, 2010).

The *macrosystem* encompasses the cultural environment in which the person lives and all other systems that affect him, including the economy, cultural values, and political systems. The macrosystem can have either a positive or a negative effect on a person's

development. For example, consider the different impact on the development of a child growing up in a third-world economy versus that of the U.S. (Bowler, 2007).

Bronfenbrenner has demonstrated major sets of influence that encompass every child (Brendtro, 2006). Family, school, and peer groups are considered to have vital and significant influence on children. The impact of additional support networks enhances their chances to succeed. All stakeholders involved in engaging Latina students through the various developmental stages will utilize these relationships to support students, based on training in the use of the Ecological Systems Theory (Boufard & Weiss, 2010). The researcher will use these layers of the ecological conceptual framework – microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem – to organize the literature review later in the subsequent section of this chapter.

Connection Between Theoretical Framework and Proposed Study

The primary objective of this study is to test the Ecological Systems Theory as a model for elucidating the incidents as correlates to Latina academic resilience in an urban high school setting. The Ecological Systems Theory takes into account the impact of environmental factors at multiple levels that influence individual behavior. According to Patton (2002), an orientation approach in qualitative research commences with an ideological or explicit theoretical viewpoint that finds out what theoretical background will direct the fieldwork and the interpretation of results. Among the ecological models available, Bronfenbrenner's model provides a valuable roadmap for examination of the high school educational environments that foster the academic resilience of urban, Latina high school students.

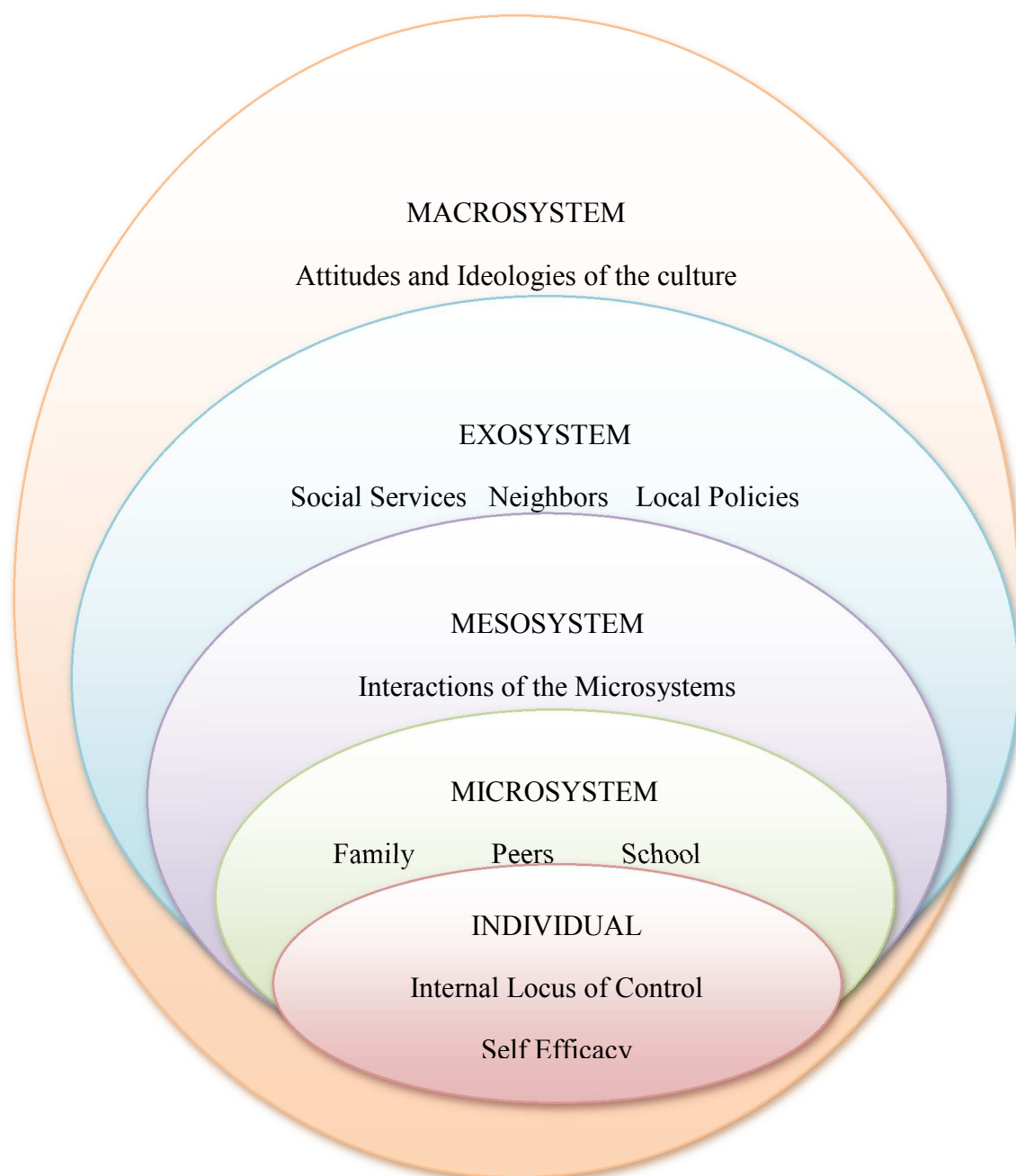


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Adapted by Rebecca Testa-Ryan

Darling (2007) explains that an individual's development cannot be comprehended in isolation. Darling's research presents evidence that the academic performance of a child must be looked at holistically to develop a clear understanding of development. The child, in essence, is actively involved in families, schools,

neighborhoods, and communities that notably shape his development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model enables the researcher to illustrate and interpret the limitations, events, and accomplishments of resilient Latina high school students based on different perceptions. This method of inquiry goes beyond what past studies have achieved by referencing individual cases of resilience; it instead shifts its focus to factors and processes that lead to academic success. Stress in resilience research has been reallocated from identifying characteristics of children who are resilient to distinguishing methods that support resilience (Ungar, 2012).

Educational Resilience

According to Wang and Gordon (2012), educational resilience is "the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences" (p. 46). In accordance with this definition, researchers focusing on the subject of resilience generally concentrate on finding out the situations, conditions, and traits that tend to enhance the academic success of youth who are potentially proficient. Resilience research within education is a form of resistance, much like academic achievement (Hill-Jackson, 2007). That is because the availability and success of such research allows educational resilience to be enhanced. Typically, the high rate of students faced with various academic achievement challenges poses a threat to the educational system. The manner in which educational resilience is constructed cannot be regarded as a fixed attribute, but instead a changeable process by which all students can change and foster (Lee, 2008). In this way, resilience is paramount to helping otherwise disadvantaged students to succeed in their academic work. Although a fair amount of scholarly literature exists on this subject, it previously has not included

cultural imperatives. This current study fills that gap by focusing on resilience specifically within Latina culture. However, it is also necessary to understand the risks Latina students face and how they cope under such stressors.

From At-Risk to Resilience

Being labeled “at risk” can lead to marginalization in schools and a focus on the limitations, rather than the capabilities and potential, students possess within. In order to support students’ academic success, it’s important to shift from using the “at risk” label to one that explains the broader context of the student’s exposure to and ability to overcome significant adversity. Resilience pathways across cultures best facilitate the individual student’s needs to support and improve their ability to learn. This is possible when all of the educators involved in the process of nurturing academic and social development and skills have a shared understanding and are working together to identify psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain students’ well-being. However, in order to learn when and how to use resilience pathways for the best interests of the students, educators need to engage in the critical and essential process of listening, and they must be willing to learn from students and to see them as capable of identifying their own educational needs in partnership with professionals and parents.

Therefore, this research study will shift from using the accepted term “at-risk” to describe students who meet a deficit-based criteria and replace it with the term resilience pathways to convey an asset-based approach; one in which all students have the ability to achieve academic success despite the lack of control over the negative environmental and social factors imposed on their lives.

Many urban, Latina students face deficit factors that inhibit the advancement of their educational resilience and success. In particular, they face environmental factors over which they have no influence, such as inferior schools, a community racked by violence, and lack of parental involvement, factors that often are used to characterize the environments of students considered to be “at-risk” (Morales, 2008). By developing a deeper understanding of these factors that contribute to school failure, educators can develop intervention and preventive services capable of enhancing the healthy development and academic success of students (Wang & Gordon, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner's model offers all stakeholders the opportunity to view risk and protective factors in a more compelling manner by examining the interactions between systems. This model contributes to “science in the discovery mode” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 801) and insights through the lived experiences of Latina youth. While researchers have identified resilience as a developmental process, Masten (2013) recommends more research to understand the complex relationship between a person and his or her environment, as well as specific pathways to resilience.

The ecological perspective examines these factors on multiple levels, such as individual, familial (microsystemic), interactions in communities (exosystemic), and culture. potentially proficient is an asset-based term that recognizes that all minority students have the ability to be academically resilient with the appropriate ecological resources and support (macrosystemic) and interactions between settings (mesosystemic). In addition, the ecological model allows for comprehensive investigation of the theory of resilience to include individual, familial, and larger systemic factors.

Integration of Risk Factors and Ecology Model Risk Factors at the Individual Level

Current research indicates negative developmental factors directly impact behavior among Latina youth. Researchers found that antisocial and criminal parents tend to have children who are antisocial and engage in delinquent behaviors (Farrington, Welsh, Piquero, Berzin, & Gardiner, 2007). Furthermore, early anti-social behavior is a predictor of problem behaviors when it manifests itself with isolation, withdrawal, or hyperactivity. Adolescents with problem behavior are at increased risk for experiencing problems in adulthood (McGue & Iacono, 2005).

LeBlanc and colleagues (2008) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the association between antisocial behavior during adolescence and high school social climate. Measures of the study included youth antisocial behavior, high school social climate, disruptive behavior in elementary school, and family adversity. Findings in the longitudinal study indicate students and teachers reported less problem behavior while in elementary than in high school. Researchers concluded that a lack of adequate discipline in the classroom may increase the likelihood of antisocial behavior in adolescents who attend these high schools. Results suggested that when students who exhibit antisocial behaviors are brought together in the same environment, they may reinforce those bad behaviors. Schools may intervene on behalf of students exhibiting antisocial behavior by establishing rules, programs, and guidance in the school environment.

Pepler and colleagues (2006), using a Canadian sample of youth, reported that bullying behavior is correlated with later violence in relationships, including sexual harassing behaviors. In other studies, antisocial behavior has also been associated with

substance use, impulsivity, and psychopathy (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). Case and Haines (2007) identified antisocial behavior to be a risk factor associated with delinquency across gender, type of offending, and age group. Factors of delinquency included positive behavior towards smoking and drinking alcohol, and having antisocial, drug-using peers.

Low intelligence also has been linked to delinquency and criminal behavior (Wong, 2010). Results suggest low verbal intelligence was a significant factor for delinquent behavior in minority children, while impulsivity was a factor for delinquent behavior for white participants. By the time a child is four years of age, he is able to express the entire range of human emotions. Predictors for delinquency have been attributed to a child who is temperamental at an early age, has a low response to accountability and authority, and has an inability to adapt (Farrington et al., 2007).

Poverty as Risk Factor

According to Haberman (2005), about 14 million children in America (one out of every four) attend an urban district school. A pervasive and nonspecific risk factor for these children is poverty. Poverty implies a lack of food, inadequate housing, inability to pay bills, and a lack of health care that directly affects health, cognitive, and social development (Huston & Bentley, 2010). Poverty is multilayered and affects a child's development across all settings; it typically marginalizes people within society, often leaving them with feelings of little representation or voice.

In the *mesosystem*, poverty indicates living in an impoverished neighborhood and attending an academically-poor school. A child who is socioeconomically disadvantaged in the *exosystem* is restricted in his or her ability to access professional and economic

opportunity. The *macrosystem* prescribes socially-accepted behavior to impoverished children by associating them with a specific social class, ethnicity, and single-parent household. These striking differences in ecology between that of a child from a middle-class environment and a child from an impoverished environment have direct and indirect effects on human development.

A study conducted in the District of Columbia (Kane, 2011) focused on the relationship between macro-level violence and the birth weight of minority children in structurally disadvantaged neighborhoods. Research findings suggested that (1) patterns of violence were significantly associated with children born with low birth weights in disadvantaged communities, and (2) these findings were conclusive for Latinas and Blacks, but not among white children. This suggests that ecological factors, such as neighborhood violence, impact health among minority communities and have a direct impact on children's academic ability upon entering school.

Increasing income inequality has directly affected minority students (Blank et al. 2006). According to López (2009), in a survey conducted in 2009 by the National Survey of Latinas for Latino Samples, nine out of ten (89%) Latino young adults say that education is important for success in life. However, data reveals only about half that number (48%) finish secondary education, enroll in postsecondary education and ultimately graduate. This disparity between their value for education and their actions appears to be due to financial pressure to support a family (Nevarez & Rico, 2007). Focusing on overcoming the limitations of poverty may be more productive in impacting the lives of minority students so that they may have the opportunity to fulfill their

ambitions. Therefore, reducing inequity requires much more equitable distribution of positive community factors.

Microsystemic Level

The term *at-risk* is placed to identify children who are experiencing adverse environments during their childhood (Gizir & Aydin, 2009). These factors may include more than one adverse conditions: (1) family violence, (2) poverty, (3) homelessness, (4) immigration status, (5) behavioral and mental health issues, (6) disability or impairment, (7) low socio-economic status, (8) parent's education levels, (9) substance abuse, (10) parent's incarceration, (11) and, poor social skills, (Gizir & Aydin, 2009; Hinnant et al., 2009). Exposure to any of these difficult environmental or social conditions is precursors for children to experience poor academic outcomes.

Schools serving Latino populations are found to be unequal in comparison to schools with a higher socioeconomic status and greater population of white students (Zurarte & Burciaga, 2010). Young children living in poverty are more likely to experience less-than-quality, early childhood instruction. LoCasale-Crouch and colleagues (2009) observed 692 classrooms to detect patterns of varying emotional and instructional support, along with varying teacher characteristics. Findings of the study suggested that the poorest-quality profile was associated with classroom poverty level, indicating that students needing the most academically-supportive environments were least likely to experience it. According to Haberman (2005), children facing risk factors often distrust adults, dislike interactions with other children, feel hopeless and are secretive, and their only form of response is to execute orders as given to them by adults.

Similarly, Swahn and Bossarte (2009) examined whether urban youth living in disadvantaged urban communities were more likely than middle-class youth to engage in what educators, scholars, and policy makers consider deficit behaviors. The label of “high-risk community” was ascribed based on rates of poverty, unemployment, single-parent households, and serious crimes. Findings confirmed youth living in an urban, disadvantaged community were significantly more likely to engage in many more health-risk behaviors than their peers. This study also showed that low grades, gun possession, suicide ideation, violent sexual victimization, and current alcohol use were significantly more prevalent among youth in a high-risk community than prevalent among urban youth in general. Based on these findings, it is essential to provide long-term, consistent, community support to deflect the possibility of youth participation in high-risk behavior.

Minli and Jun (2011) state, “Two types of microsystem level factors are relevant...: parent-child relationships and child characteristics” (p. 61). Although Latino parents report having high aspirations for their children, they often lack the cultural and social capital necessary to guide their students to fulfill those goals (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Many Latinas face challenges that hinder full participation in their children’s schooling often due to lack of experience with and knowledge of the school system. Participation and strong parent-teacher relationships are further compromised when parents feel that the only time that they are contacted by the school is when their child is manifesting behavioral challenges or academic failure (NCES, 2009).

Vanderbilt University conducts research focusing on the family-school relationship dynamic. Findings from a series of studies cite numerous reasons for lack of parental involvement, including parents feeling inferior to educated staff, lack of

understanding the of their role in an academic setting, lack of self-efficacy, language barriers, pre-existing negative feelings about school from their own lived experiences, negative belief systems among teachers towards Latino families, and excessive requests for family members to fulfill volunteer opportunities (Flynn & Nolan, 2008). In addition, teachers, principals, and counselors working in urban schools often do not reflect the demographics of Latino students and are often inexperienced and less qualified (Schneider, Martinez & Owens, 2006). The inability to collaborate with teachers and school staff can lead to lack of school connectedness and disengagement (Kearney, 2008).

In 2003, nearly 40% of Latino parents did not have a high school diploma compared to only about 4% of white parents (NCES, 2009). As a result of relatively lower educational levels and lack of knowledge about the school system, Latino parents may not become closely involved in the overall educational experiences of their children (NCES, 2009). According to Gándara and Contreras (2009), “The economic situation of parents, their schooling history, the neighborhoods into which children are born and raised all have powerful effects on children’s aspirations and preparation for schooling before they even step inside a classroom” (p. 250).

Furthermore, recent immigrants may face special employment and economic challenges (e.g., low-paid or temporary work, the need to work more than one job, or unemployment) that can affect their ability to become involved in their child’s education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Poverty also indirectly affects the ability of parents to offer consistent monitoring and supervision, a range of socially and educationally stimulating experiences, and adequate family management practices (Haberman, 2005).

School systems have historically divided students based on race and ethnicity, English language skills, SES, age, and gender (Morales, 2008). For student relationships, these divisions have consequences. Schools also have assigned students to various groups or classes based on perceptions of their academic ability. School tracking describes the process of separating students into leveled course selections according to academic ability, typically demonstrated by standardized test scores (Ansalone, 2010). Researchers have found Latino students are likely not to be excluded from college preparatory courses because of tracking policies, misidentification as ELL or special education, or the personal perception of students' potential (Nevarez & Rico, 2007). Opponents of tracking argue that lower tracks are characterized by an inferior education, while students from predominately white, middle to upper-middle class families are often placed in upper tracks, typically with a better curriculum (Oakes, 2008).

Watanambe (2008) conducted an ethnographic case study to focus on the quality of classroom instruction for students in the *regular* classes, which are disproportionately populated by students of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with that of their peers in *academically gifted* classes. Findings revealed five key differences in instruction across tracks that favored students in the *academically gifted* classes. Students in the *academically gifted* classes were exposed to less explicit test preparation, more time for priority instruction, more feedback on writing assignments, more independent projects, and more challenging instruction and assignments. Students from diverse backgrounds and low SES in the *regular* track were not given equal access to knowledge that could help in closing the achievement gap. These differences in instructional methods have serious implications for students' educational and professional trajectories. Tracking

Latino students in the lower tracks of academic courses deters them from believing that college is attainable (Stambler & Weinstein, 2010). According to Mehan (1996), to end tracking in schools, changes must begin in the beliefs, attitudes, and values of teachers, as well as in the curriculum and instruction.

Mesosystemic Level

The mesosystem consists of the simultaneous relationships between two or more individuals (microsystems) that directly affect the person (Minli & Jun, 2011). These relationships can be between the individual and his or her parents, peer groups, school personnel, or authority. Although the school environment is important, there is little knowledge regarding Latino student collaboration in the school environment outside the classroom (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Based on these findings, Rivera and Waxman (2007) advocated changing the educational ecology so that it enhances learning for all students and increases the motivation and levels of other variables that facilitate resilience for youth considered to be potentially proficient.

Unfortunately, endeavors to form positive relationships between schools and families in many urban schools are rare. This has been attributed to the mistrust that exists between parents and schools, and between school professionals and minority/low-income families and communities (Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004). Maurizi (2013), and colleagues reported Latino students from low-income families often do not feel a sense of belonging in their school or neighborhood. This lack of connectedness to school and neighborhood impacts their academic and psychological functioning (Dahl, Ceballo, & Huerta, 2010).

Stiefel, Schwartz, and Ellen (2007) have suggested that teachers may have differing expectations with regard to ethnic minority students as a function of attitudinal differences. Educators may have very low expectations of their students drawn from low-income or minority backgrounds in terms of academic performance. Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) conducted a meta-analysis study to determine whether teachers hold race-ethnic expectations for their students. Researchers found that teachers had higher expectations for Asian-Americans than for Latina students. Lower expectations for Latina students resulted in specific teacher behavioral practices, such as increased, negative referrals, less praise, and more criticism. The study concluded that differential treatment could lead to lower academic achievement and limit educational opportunities. When students are consistently exposed to low expectations, they also tend to lose their motivation and self-confidence. Ultimately, this could lead to reduced academic success. Unfortunately, certain teachers give up on their students especially when these students prove to be challenging. When this happens, teachers effectively expect to have failure and subsequently blame their failure on the students (Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004). Further, students are not provided with the necessary information to be college-ready.

Literature reveals various barriers Latino students face to becoming college or career prepared. The University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research (2008) completed a survey-based, longitudinal exploration of students in 12 high school English classrooms in Chicago Public Schools. Findings revealed that although Latino students have high aspirations to attend college, only 61% of students actually applied to college, and only 50% enrolled and attended. Researchers concluded the gap was the result of missing social capital-- the complex, inside knowledge of applying to college

and applying for financial aid. Latino students who do not have family members or high school academic counselors to provide guidance to apply for college face a major setback for their futures. This study indicates disconnect in the ecological systems pathway that is not providing the necessary guidance for Latina students to succeed in their environment. What is of greater significance is how we can resolve this disconnect by informing future Latina students of the practices of applying to college.

In a study of 12 Latina students who had overcome adversity and successfully enrolled in higher education, Zalaquett and Lopez (2006) identified major obstacles as receiving poor information about the college application process, academic choices, and marginal adult supervision. For example, one participant reported: “My major obstacle was that my parents couldn’t help me with any of my applications because neither of them went to school and neither of them spoke English” (p. 38). Although many parents could not speak English and lacked familiarity with the American educational system, their support was nonetheless recognized as a significant element that had helped their children succeed in high school and consequently pursue higher education (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Furthermore, four students described guidance from teachers and a school counselor as providing a positive influence, and several described support from friends as an important source of aid in the college education process (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006).

In summation, previous literature demonstrates the disadvantages Latinas endure in the meso-systemic level during their academic career. These factors should be addressed in further studies in order to change the dynamic of these students’ educational experiences at school. Furthermore, listening to the voices of Latina students and their experiences through the ecological systems model creates a detailed understanding of the

specific social supports that are necessary to become academically resilient. These systems should no longer be separated or isolated in research studies; instead, they should be connected to implement resilient pathways for academic success. This research study will examine the experiences of academically resilient Latinas preparing to attend college and their ecological encounters that created pathways to their success. Sharing Latina experiences is necessary to embark on developing strategies for future students to be fully informed of the processes that lead to college attainment. The study will fill this gap in the current literature by identifying each of the significant ecological systems that contribute to the academic resilience of Latina students.

Exosystemic Level

This level identifies the influence of outside structures over which the individual does not have direct control (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, students are influenced by social and economic status, parental education levels, media violence, and school climate. Latinas from disadvantaged communities characteristically face additional risk factors than youth from more advantaged backgrounds, who often have fewer external resources to buffer them from these risks (Schlee, Mullis & Shriner, 2008). Exposure of violence from media and from environmental conditions impacts students in the classroom (Combrick-Graham, 2013).

Certain risk factors actually predispose some children to poor performance in school, such as neighborhood violence (Regoli & Hewitt, 2011). In Chicago, the apparent association between violence and education is compelling. It was found that at least 80% of children who lived in urban areas had been witness to community violence. Furthermore, at least 70% reported being victims of this violence (Combrinck-Graham,

2013). Studies of Chicago schools also revealed that shooting incidents in excess of 70% of those witnessed by youth actually involved a victim who was either a family member or a friend. A further 10% of the witnessed shooting incidents actually involved either a parent or a sibling (Regoli & Hewitt, 2011). Researchers have found that this level of exposure to school and community violence results in distractions, and has the potential of disrupting students' cognitive development (Graham-Bermann, 2011). For instance, Sharkey (2010) found that students who took a test of verbal ability within a few days after witnessing a local homicide had significantly lower cognitive results relative to those same-neighborhood students who took the same test after a much longer time had lapsed after witnessing the homicide.

To deal with this challenge, schools have devised policies that give preeminence to the need to prevent violence. Such policies have also been made part of school programs (Saulny, 2009). This is reflected in their enactment of the *safe passage* policy aimed at helping students travel safely between home and school, as well as after-school programs and mentoring resources for students deemed most likely to be victims of gun violence (Saulny, 2009). Children anticipating violence or danger may become distracted. In turn, this might cause them to have difficulties staying focused and learning while in school (Graham-Bermann, 2011). Indeed, research indicates that being exposed to violence elevates the risk of experiencing a variety of detrimental outcomes. These outcomes include internalizing disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and externalizing disorders, such as fighting, drug and weapon use, as well as negative neuro-developmental and biological effects (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 2003).

Exposure to community violence raised the risk of gang membership among Latino youth. According to the 2008 New York Gang Statistics, half (50%) of all gang members are Hispanic/Latino; 32% are African-American/black, and 11% are Caucasian/white (National Gang Center, 2010). The research found that risk factors in each of the five developmental domains increase youth's affiliation with gangs. Youth who experience violent behavior at an early age (individual), lack parental guidance (family), experience school failure (school), tend to associate with other gang members (peer), and reside in unsafe communities are at a higher risk of joining a gang. Consequently, living in a disadvantaged neighborhood has harmful effects that impact numerous cognitive processes associated with educational performance (Graham-Bermann, 2011).

Overall, research has demonstrated that violence and poverty are major hindrances to educational attainment (Valencia, 2010). A major challenge has been lack of resources necessary to fight poverty and prevent student exposure to violence (Valencia, 2010). This is a subject that has been addressed to a limited extent. Resources, such as provision of school-escorted transport for students, have been identified as important. Other necessary resources could include social amenities in the home that would, in turn, limit incidents of violence. When each home has access to adequate food and healthcare, for instance, chances of domestic violence stemming from lack of these resources would be reduced (Valencia, 2010).

This study adds to the existing literature by pinpointing resources available to help students perform better in school, despite living in violence-prone communities. Through the voices of Latina high school students, one may learn of their capacity to find

resources within their ecological system to overcome adversity. Their experiences fill a void in current literature concerning Latina academic resilience. My study will allow for the students' perspectives and experiences to be understood within the context of intersecting ecological pathways that contribute to the formation of the academically resilient Latina.

Macrosystemic Level

The macrosystem is exemplified by the relationship an individual has with his or her cultural background and values (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Many educators, whether intentionally or inadvertently, blame a lack of academic success on dynamics that relate to a child's home life, including his or her socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic background. These presumed deficit discourses are often considered shortfalls that students possess and must contend with upon starting school. According to Gorski (2013), deficit thinking can be understood as a "blame the victim" approach that is systematically applied to a group of people sharing common traits. Indeed, educators label ethnic minority groups on the basis of their deficits and/or problems as opposed to the basis of their core competencies and/or strengths (Cammorata, 2004).

According to Valencia (2010) deficit-based thinking is the process of locating the basis of failure within the individual, family, or culture of marginalized groups who struggle to meet majority-defined measures of social success. The fundamental belief of deficit thinking is that the inequalities among disenfranchised groups are not a consequence of racism or economic injustice, but rather assumptions of inherent inferior intellectual, moral, and behavioral abilities (Gorski, 2008; Yosso, 2005). However, deficit-based assumptions are often based on stereotypes accepted by society, rather than

fact. Mainstream stereotypes only justify this ideology by portraying minority communities as intellectually, behaviorally, and culturally deficient (Weiner, 2006). Based on this perception, society begins to distance itself from low-income families by placing them into categories that further explain or justify their inferior ability to succeed. Apple (2006) explains:

We are law-abiding, hardworking, decent, and virtuous. “They”—usually poor people and immigrants—are very different. They are lazy, immoral, and permissive. These binary oppositions act to exclude indigenous people, women, the poor, and others from the community of worthy individuals. (p. 22)

Conforming to deficit thinking can be observed in education by responding to the problem of the socioeconomic achievement gap. Ruby Payne’s (1995) self-published book, entitled *A framework for understanding poverty*, has sold millions of copies and is in high demand for professional development in education (Keller, 2006). Her framework for understanding poor children and families asserts a self-enabling culture of poverty that prevents the poor from emerging out of poverty (Tough, 2007). This culture of poverty contends that poor and ethnic minorities assent to values that are not comparable to those of the middle or upper classes.

Nevertheless, Payne’s conclusions are not supported by research (Ng & Rury, 2009). In fact, her self-published book is packaged with claims based on stereotypes and deficit views of poverty and minority communities. For example, research studies have demonstrated that low-income families have the same attitudes about the value of education as wealthier families (Kuperminc et al., 2009). In other words, deficit-based thinking deflects attention from personal abilities, support systems, resources, and

strengths of Latino youth from high-risk environments. Instead, deficit-based thinking: (1) deflects blame from societal and systemic causes of underachievement (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009); (2) holds families, communities and students accountable for underachievement (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007); (3) asserts that minority cultural values are flawed and play a role in low educational attainment (Yosso, 2005); (4) asserts that being linguistically different causes academic failure (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008), and (5) furthers bias and stereotypes of minority groups and communities (Gorski, 2013).

Typically, such labeling results in the establishment of special programs for the less-well-educated so they can one day close the achievement gap. As deficit-based thinking aspires to “describe, explain, predict, and prescribe” its victim’s behavior (Valencia, 2012, p. 7), educators who engage in it tend to prescribe interventions that often include modifying curriculum and instruction. The results of some interventions derived from deficit-based thinking include school segregation, lowered expectations, and use of unchallenging pedagogical methods.

It is imperative to challenge accepted principles about the educational abilities of Latina students. This negative emphasis has had the detrimental consequence of concealing the assets Latino families and children possess to be academically successful. Therefore, educators must implement a strength-based approach that focuses on the talents of Latina students from high-risk environments. This principle is reaffirmed by the words of Cabrera, Beeghly and Eisenberg (2012), who state:

Minority children, including those from low-income backgrounds, have strengths (e.g., social skills, oral narrative skills) that may predispose teachers and

educators to view these children in a more positive light, avoid negative stereotypes, and build on these strengths. For example, when teachers refer to dual language learners as those who “do not speak English” rather than as children who “are becoming bilingual” they are inadvertently endorsing a negative perspective. (p. 14)

This study builds on the existing literature in this area, as well as filling the literary gap, by specifically emphasizing the important role that systems and society play in the education of Latina students. Based on current literature, there is no reason to conclude that the value of education in low-income, minority households differs in any way from that of wealthier households. Such research dismisses the deficit-based paradigm and negative stereotypes still used to guide instruction for educators.

Instead, this study will emphasize the internal and external factors and personal resources Latina students utilize to overcome ongoing stressors, rather than framing the struggle in terms of deficits and risk characteristics, as is overwhelmingly found in literature. How we define a problem frames our inquiry and informs the solutions we employ to solve it (Yin, 2009). The framework provided by the Ecological Systems Theory focuses on the way personal, social, and environmental resources combine to reduce the potentially negative effects of stress factors on students and analyzes the experiences of resilient Latina youth to evaluate and design prevention and education programs.

The present literature isolates inquiry by using specific ecological levels to address the issues that limit academic resilience. To better understand this framework, one must consider the effect that a change in one layer may have on another layer. In addition, this study will address this limitation in literature by taking into account

multiple levels of interaction in an environment of complex overlapping systems. The study is framed to better understand ecological dynamics that contribute to the development of new approaches to foster Latina academic resilience not existing in current literature.

Integration of Protective Processes and Ecology Model

Protective Factor: Individual

When a child is not exposed to positive adults or role models it becomes challenging to succeed academically. In the absence of a support system provided by parents, peers, schools, or role models, a student's attempt to be academically successful becomes challenging. However, many Latina students possess individual qualities needed to overcome such adversity. Self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her capacity to reach goals and complete tasks (Bandura, 1997). Past research has demonstrated that students' beliefs in their abilities to perform academically predict their actual achievement levels in school (Putwain, Sander, & Larson 2013).

Niehuas and colleagues (2012) conducted a middle school longitudinal study to examine how self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and participation in an after-school program contributed to the academic achievement of urban Latino students. Results of this study (Niehuas, Rudasill, & Adelson, 2012) revealed that intrinsic motivation was an important, contributing factor associated with the GPAs of students; self-efficacy was a positive predictor of students' school attendance, and attendance at the after-school program also contributed positively to students' math achievement. Therefore, self-efficacy relates meaningfully to the strong, positive, and statistically significant correlates between self-efficacy and academic achievement.

Self-efficacy has also been related to psychological adjustment (Perez, 2009). The study investigated the risk factors, personal protective factors, and environmental resources of 110 undocumented Latina high school, community college, and university students from Southern California. Latino participants identified undocumented status, SES, and parental education levels as significant risk factors. According to the study, Latinas believe that the important personal protective factors are giftedness, parental valuing of education, and bilingualism. The environmental factors Latinas felt are significant include family environment, extracurricular involvement, and volunteerism. Of major relevance was the finding that when multiple personal and environmental resources are present, the academic performance of Latino students is generally positive, even in the presence of multiple sources of psychosocial risk. These findings, taken together, draw a vivid picture of Latina experience of education in the U.S. However, few studies have examined the effect of the Ecological Systems Theory, which promote Latina academic resilience; specifically, how each of the ecological systems has positively opened pathways to academic excellence.

Gottfried (2009) indicates a student's motivation to learn has been tied to a sense of belonging to school, personal connections to staff, academic success, and lower dropout rates. A student's high motivation to school is associated with having an internal locus of control and academic resilience. In a qualitative study conducted by Gándara and Contreras (2009), 28 students in a college prep program, *Puente*, were classified in four categories based on grades, test scores, effort, and motivation. Researchers found that all of the students in category one (highly motivated) had taken college entrance exams and had aspirations to attend a four-year college. Students in category two aspired to attend

state colleges or private four-year colleges where they believed they had a better chance of being accepted. All but one student in category three stated they wanted to go to college, but did not provide details beyond stating that community college would likely come first. Only one student in category four had taken the SAT, but also aimed to raise his grades in order to attend college.

The support for and by family members was the significant theme of this research study. It is important to consider the role that family may play in motivating Latina, college-bound students.

Protective Factor: Microsystemic Level

Among the possible protective factors, an immediate, care-giving environment has the most positive effect on youth development (Benard, 2004). This consists of caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation that meet all basic human needs, such as safety, love, respect, and mastery (Benard, 2004). More specifically, resilience research has identified that feeling connected to one's family and having positive family experiences are the most influential protective factors in the lives of youth (Benard, 2004). These and other external protective factors foster development of internal protective factors, resulting in positive youth development (Benard, 2004).

Based on the enrollment trends issued by the National Household Education Survey (NHES) from 1993 to 2007, poor families devoted just as much time and effort as wealthier families to exploring school choices for their children (Grady, Bielick, & NCES, 2010). This included families that were single-parent households, had low levels of education, and had a poverty status. This contradicts the deficit-based thinking commonly associated with families and students with minority backgrounds. Although

parental involvement in children's education decreases between elementary school and high school (Constantino, 2007), the family nonetheless constitutes a critical source of social capital for all their educational endeavors.

Research studies have been conducted to further understand the positive influence ecological systems have to promote academic resilience. Alfaro and colleagues (2006) used an ecological systems framework to look at Latina students in the 9th and 10th grades to better understand academic motivation. Results indicated that the mother's academic support was significantly and positively related to academic motivation for girls. For boys, the father's academic support was positively, but not significantly, related to academic motivation. Additionally, the teacher's academic support positively influenced academic motivation for both boys and girls.

For youth aiming to rise above adversity, the opportunity to form at least one close bond with a positive role model is critical (Garmezy, 1982; Werner & Smith, 2001). This caregiver can provide stability in the youth's life, serving as a buffer and motivational force to help him or her push through adversity (Benard, 2004). In a study of low-income, Mexican adolescents and their families, Stanton-Salazar (2001) found that immigrant parents of successful students articulated high aspirations for their children. This was in spite of their not having had the opportunity to attend school in their own country, and being unable to help their children complete schoolwork, or navigate the educational system.

Supportive parents are particularly mentioned by successful Mexican-American students as an important source of support and encouragement (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). In a study of undergraduate Latino students examining the factors that contributed to their

academic achievement, Fry and Gonzales found that all students reported feeling supported and encouraged by their parents and that their parents had consistently stressed academic achievement. Likewise, Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, and Nero (2009) found Latino parents took very seriously the importance of developing successful social and academic experiences throughout their childhood.

Strong relationships with extended family have also been identified as an important source of support for successful students. McMahon and colleagues (2009) identified a significant relationship with at least one parent, grandparent, or parental figure as a significant factor in the success of 11 students from 16 schools over three years. Several students also reported relationships with other relatives, peers, neighbors, school counselors, and teachers as the relationships that helped further their academic success.

In addition, peer relationships are important. Students whose peers emphasize the value of education are more likely to be academically successful than their counterparts (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006). Positive peer relationships fostered through an emphasis on learning rather than competition provide children with support outside the family in an environment in which they can experiment, develop skills and values, and learn to share, help, and nurture one another (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006). Students with strong positive peer relationships are less likely to participate in high-risk behaviors and are more able to persevere through academic challenges (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006). According to Wang et al. (1998, as cited in Mauricio, 2008), peers can also help students develop strong attitudes toward schools and strengthen their self-perception of academic competence. Thus, Wang et al. (as cited in Mauricio, 2008, p. 34) contend that:

A peer group's attitude toward school is a significant predictor of a group member's grades, achievement test scores, value placed on being a good student, and perceived competence. Students whose peers valued high achievement spent more time on homework, finished more of their homework assignments, attended school more regularly, and were less often tardy or absent without permission.

(pp. 12-13)

Cultivating the academic resilience of Latina students requires collaboration among all stakeholders within the educational microcosm (Heineke et al., 2012).

School counselors are well-positioned to lead efforts to help Latino students tackle the barriers that many face and to support Latino students by effectively addressing cultural differences and rifts between the school and Latino families (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). First, counselors must implement school-wide efforts to eliminate language barriers because parents who understand the school's expectations and structure are better able to support children (Lee, 2008). Counselors can also offer information regarding home and community beliefs of Latina students to help teachers understand how factors impacting classroom learning. According to Waters and colleagues (2009), the likelihood of transmitting social and institutional support increases with the level of regular interaction between school agents and parents. This helps build relationships based on trust and support.

At the heart of the educational system is a child whose success depends on immediate surroundings, as well as the cultural, social, and political attitudes that daily influence the child's environment. An ecological approach to education reform is particularly useful, and some would argue critical, because it addresses these complex

and interdependent human systems. These considerations are largely absent from the present literature, and this study will expand understanding of the issues that youths face in schools as it documents the impact of each system on the positive experiences of Latina academic resilience. This study seeks to establish evidence that the student is able to express and articulate her own intuitions and sociological reflections based upon her experiences in each ecological level leading to academic resilience.

Protective Factor: Mesosystemic Level

The limitation of Latino parenting research studies has led to the acceptance of the deficit model. Various studies on Latino parenting style have evolved from authoritarian, to warm care giving, to once comparable to white parents (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). An important component in Latino culture is family. The term *familismo* refers to Latino attachment to family core values and long held traditions of the nuclear and extended family (Smith-Morris, Morales-Campos, Alvarez, & Turner, 2013). *Familismo* stresses the family over the individual, showing respect for patriarchs and honoring the family name (Schwartz, 2007). As part of the family culture, parents and extended family not only contribute to motivation regarding schooling, but also provide strong guidance concerning continuing one's education (Leonard, 2009). Parental support helps to direct children towards positive behavior in school by reinforcing the notion of education as valuable, and by monitoring their children's engagement in school (Niemeyer et al., 2009).

In a study of the relationship between *familism(o)*, parental involvement, and academic performance in Caucasian and Hispanic adolescents, Niemeyer et al. (2009) found that parental involvement is clearly associated with academic performance in both

Hispanic and Caucasian students, regardless of the barriers faced by Hispanic parents (i.e., cultural differences and language difficulties). Other studies have found that high parental expectations, which are provided with family support and love, are related to academic success (Niemeyer et al., 2009; Perez, 2009).

The most commonly cited message promoting resilience is the caregiver's belief in a child's capacities (Niemeyer et al., 2009). This means belief in the child, even when he or she does not believe in himself or herself. Such positive expectations are often buttressed by other family characteristics, such as structure, reasonable and defined expectations, discipline, guidance, and encouragement (Niemeyer et al., 2009). This cultural bond helps the child cope with social or environmental difficulties, such as low socioeconomic status, employment, dangerous neighborhoods, violence, loss of work, and discrimination (Deng et al., 2006).

Academically successful and supportive peers also comprise an important protective factor and foster the academic resilience of Mexican-American students. Gonzalez and her colleagues (2003) used qualitative research methods to examine how relationships with family, peers, and school personnel impacted the post-secondary opportunities of Latina (female) students. They found that peer networks that were academically involved in an honors program fostered the desire of Latinas to attend a top-rated university. The study found that peers not only offered support for the attainment of a college degree, but also shared important information about the college admission process.

Protective Factor: Exosystemic Level

According to Benson, Galbraith and Espeland (2012), schools can both represent the environment that promotes resilient responses to adverse experiences, and provide the academic methods and prevention and intervention programs necessary for developing individual internal protective factors. In the culture of a school, positive social interactions among all stakeholders and the development of social and emotional learning are fundamental for academic success (Benson et al., 2012).

The strengths-based perspective is concerned about building confidence in individuals to not only survive their educational experiences but to thrive (Liesveld & Miller, 2005). This is because this perspective presumes that greater success could be achieved if and when individuals emphasize their best attributes. This is in contrast to an individual who merely strives to overcome existing deficits or challenges (Clifton & Harter, 2003). The aim of strength-based perspective is identification of resources and strengths (resiliencies), which exist in the individual, family, or group as they happen within a specific context (Kuperminc et al., 2009). By determining student potentials, educators initiate strengths-based education and are able to foster and help students apply their strengths to the learning process so that they can achieve academic excellence.

Creating a strength-based, academic environment that meets students' needs emphasizes the collaborative efforts of the school, family, and community. By creating this network, youth and their families become more resourceful when facing and responding to adversity. This is as opposed to developing dependence and reliance on the system in place (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). In an effort to develop a strength-based approach to resilience, the Search Institute (Benson et al., 2012) created a list of 40

significant assets that improve growth and development in adolescents, and support the roles that families, schools, neighborhoods, youth organizations, and communities enact in youth development. The first 20 developmental assets are external developmental assets that are manifested in positive relationships with people and institutions in a young individual's life (Benson et al., 2012). There are four categories critical to this study. The first two categories are external assets: (1) support, which helps youths feel safe, secure, and valued by their community; and (2) empowerment, which allows youths to participate in the community. The third category consists of boundaries and aspirations that guide behavior and reinforce positive outcomes. The fourth category is the ability to organize opportunities for growth, including creative activities, youth and community programs, and quality activities with the family (Benson et al., 2012).

The Search Institute also stressed four categories of internal developmental assets held by resilient adolescents. The first category of internal assets is a commitment to lifelong learning. The second category is a sense of control over the choices and relationships they build to lead successful lives. The third is high self-esteem, which assists in building one's own worth. The fourth category is the formation of a positive identity that makes it possible for every adolescent to have a sense of self-worth and purpose. The strength-based research model measures what is essential to shape the strong minds, skills, and relationships that all young people need in order to succeed (Benson et al., 2012).

Scholars are now focusing on the positive developmental pathways of Latina youth. Cabrera (2013) confirmed literature that minority children show strengths in social interaction, ethnic identity, and language. Several of the previously noted research

findings have demonstrated how minority families and children facing adversity at home, school, and community are able to defy stereotypes. Educators must now value these strengths and capitalize on these advantages thus far have been ignored. This study's focus on ecological factors and processes that foster academic resilience among Latina students can provide practical strategies to facilitate pathways of student success.

Little attention has been placed on both the ecological factors and processes that have unintentionally maintained racial inequities in academic achievement as well as the assumptions placed on urban students by school professionals (Noguera, 2008). To address this challenge, Wang and Gordon (2012) suggested the formation of partnerships that can harness the resources of family, school, and community to create contexts that support students' learning success by meeting the physical and social wellness needs of those students and their families. Bryan (2005) notes:

School-family-community partnerships should be based on a model of collaborative initiatives, or on relationships among school personnel, parents, family members, community members, and representative of community-based organizations, such as businesses, churches, libraries, and social service agencies ... work[ing] together to coordinate and implement programs and activities aimed at the increased academic, emotional, and social success of students served by the school. ... When schools, families, and communities foster protective factors, they are putting risk-reducing mechanisms in place that mediate risks in four ways: children are less impacted by the effects of risks with which they have come in direct contact, the danger of exposure to the risk is reduced or the risk itself is modified, children's self-efficacy and self-esteem are enhanced, and children are

provided with opportunities for meaningful involvement in their environments. (p. 220)

Looking at adversity through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides individuals with an in-depth perspective of recognizing that it takes much more than a school system to assist families and children with the resources necessary to overcome adversity. Developing resilience entails creating collaborative pathways for family, school, and community in culturally relevant ways (Sheldon, 2003).

In a longitudinal study of socioeconomically disadvantaged families, Appleyard (2007) found children who received positive social support demonstrated positive social relationships during early adulthood and normal functioning, even if they manifested ambiguous friendships during childhood. However, children who did not develop positive social relationships demonstrated ongoing instability. These studies concerning the protective factors in regulating risk have been substantiated in further studies. Garmezy and colleagues (1988) identified three categories of protective factors. These categories included individual characteristics, the influence of the family, and, finally, external supports. Wang and Gordon (2012) maintained that successful schools have a strong, accountable leadership; are welcoming to parents and children, and have sufficient resources to support high-quality instruction to meet the needs of individual children.

According to Wang and Gordon (2012), schools can provide support to students, particularly to those potentially proficient, through resilience-building experiences that focus on five main themes. These themes are: *belonging, competency, usefulness, optimism, and potency*. A particular focus on any one of these factors or processes can contribute to some student improvement, but only a focus on all of these related

components in an organized and cohesive manner creates the utmost sense of resilience and leads to achievement and success. Experiences that relate to these five themes are likely to enhance students' motivation and self-esteem and, consequently, their achievement (Hechtman, 2005).

In a study of Mexican-American students, Fry and Gonzales (2008) found that those with high grades had a greater sense of belonging to their school than did students with failing grades. Several empirical studies of high-performing, high-poverty schools have indicated that many of these schools foster educational resilience (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Behavioral research suggests that certain environmental actions can reduce discipline problems and help teachers and students recover instructional time (Woolley & Bowen, 2007). They include explicitly describing behavioral expectations, directly teaching appropriate behavior, providing support to help students meet expectations, monitoring individual and school-wide behavior, and providing frequent positive reinforcement. Among these actions, Woolley and Bowen find that the provision of teacher social support is an especially important factor in the affective and behavioral aspects of engagement for middle and high school Latina students thought to be on the path of dropping out.

Belonging has been positively associated with preventing students from dropping out of high school. Ozer and colleagues (2008) conducted a quantitative study of 32 high seniors from nine urban schools and examined the experiences that promoted feelings of belonging to school. In particular, researchers looked at students' feelings of respect for and caring by teachers. Findings revealed the importance to the students of having a sense of connectedness, including respecting teachers who demonstrated engaging styles

of instruction; relationship building in the classroom, and the desire to be “known” on a personal level as a form of caring. Teaching students social and emotional skills, such as problem-solving, self-reliance, and responsibility, can also help prevent problem behavior and promote academic success (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 2003).

Two factors are of critical importance for teachers when it comes to the success of adolescents: deep respect for the adolescent experience, and the ability to look beyond “bad” behavior and instead seek to understand that behavior as a way adolescents use to cope with the adversities of life (Ungar, 2012). Núñez (2009) conducted a study exploring social and intercultural capital while Latina students transitioned into high school, finding that students had a stronger sense of belonging when they perceived that the faculty was interested in them. This suggests the powerful role teachers have in building student attachment to a school; given this role, teachers should focus on building relationships with and among students.

Showing respect for the individual student requires that teachers give their students choices and control over what and how they study, instead of lecturing, invoking guilt, or demanding assurances. Rather than acting like authoritarians, teachers should model compassionate decisiveness through the use of “I” rather than “you” messages, and sharing decision-making power and authority with responsible students (Ungar, 2012). Adhering to this method of instruction and discipline provides a more genuine feeling of safety and democracy, encouraging students to attend class and to do their homework (Dolan, 2009).

School systems at the micro, exo, and meso levels can impact the development and maintenance of anti-social or pro-social behavior, be a powerful source of social

support and bonding, and influence Latina youth's investment in academics (Combrinck-Graham, 2013). Micro-level factors emphasize the effectiveness of classroom instruction. These include replicable patterns of teacher behaviors and student achievement. Macro-level factors encompass the total school environment and related extra-school variables (Combrinck-Graham, 2013). At both levels, teachers' interactions with students and the interactions of students with their peers can serve as sources of support for students who face various obstacles (Wang & Gordon., 2012). Studies of effective teaching, a rich source of data on the micro-level variables that contribute to school effectiveness, have often identified a teacher-centered model of instruction and discipline as the most effective method of reaching students (Wang & Gordon, 2012).

Driscoll (2006) conducted a longitudinal study of the factors that promote academic resilience involving 24,599, low-SES, 8th-grade students thought to be on course for academic failure. With a diverse sampling across ethnic backgrounds, the author found that the graduation rates of high-performing students rose with increasing levels of teacher support, communication with parents about school activities and classroom experiences, and positive attitudes toward school. Driscoll also found that the likelihood of graduating increased for students with high educational expectations and plans, when their peers perceived school optimistically, and when their parents were engaged in their schooling. Furthermore, among students actively engaged in school, he found those who had a high level of teacher support were more likely to graduate compared to those who had low levels of teacher support. These findings emphasize the significance of parental, peer, and teacher support in academic success.

Protective Factor: Macrosystemic Level

Another critical factor in understanding processes in resilience is an individual's interaction with his or her cultural background. It is a *cultural blueprint* that determines the social structures and activities that occur in an individual's immediate system levels (Liao, Li, & Deak 2010). Protective factors are often rooted in cultural traditions, religious rituals and ceremonies, and community support services; however, limited research concerns the culturally-specific support systems that function to protect individuals. Scholars are now focusing on the positive developmental pathways of Latina youth. New findings in literature confirm that minority children show strengths in three domains of development: social, ethnic identity, and language (Cabrera et al., 2012).

Research on pro-social behavior among Mexican-American youth has a positive impact on their academic achievement. Several research findings defy socially-accepted stereotypes of minority families and children facing adversity at home, school, and the community. A study by Carlo, Knight, McGinley, and Hayes (2011), for example, examined the relationships between parental inductions, sympathy, pro-social moral reasoning, and pro-social behaviors among Mexican-American youth and European-American youth. The study completed measures of parental inductions, sympathy, pro-social and moral reasoning, and six different types of pro-social behaviors. Parental inductions refer to supportive disciplinary actions that use verbal reasoning to enrich the child's knowledge of his or her consequences. The development of sympathy among Latina children encourages them to understand the perspectives of others and is highly linked to moral reasoning.

Participants in the study included 207 early adolescents, who self-identified as Mexican-American, and 108 who self-identified as European-American. Findings showed that Mexican-American youth engaged in higher levels of pro-social behaviors than the European-American youth (Knight & Carlo, 2012). An important implication of this research study is that Latina culture, as reflected in values, beliefs, and customs, should be incorporated in the developmental learning process of students. Particular community characteristics also appear to be protective factors buffering young people from the effects of adversity (Benard, 2004). They include the existence of informal networks of neighbors, churches, and community-based organizations able to provide emotional support and counsel, as well as access to specialist services. School environments may provide protective factors that safeguard students from school failure. Wang and Gordon (2012) found that although individuals with strong personal protective factors are most likely to be academically-resilient, supportive families and schools can foster academic resilience in students lacking personal protective factors. In a study of the risk factors, personal protective factors, and environmental resources of 110 undocumented Latino high school, community college, and university students, Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2009) identified undocumented status, SES, and parental education level as important risk factors. Giftedness, the parental valuing of education, bilingualism, extracurricular involvement, and volunteerism were identified as important protective factors.

In a longitudinal study conducted by Galindo and Fuller (2010), Latino children's social competencies were measured to determine cognitive growth in classrooms. Latino students were compared by looking at the competencies of children raised in monolingual

homes versus those growing up in bilingual homes. Latino children who used both languages displayed stronger growth, suggesting that being bilingual is a developmental asset, which can explain why some minority children surpass expectations. Again, this finding contradicts the related stereotype featured in the “culture of poverty” previously noted, exemplifying the strengths many Latinas possess, but which are often ignored due to the prevalence of deficit-based thinking in society.

Extensive literature aimed to investigate ecological systems independently without considering the significance of viewing the systems interdependently fails to help one understand how various yet interrelated parts of society could value Latino psychosocial development and social action. Based on the review of literature, there is a gap in the research on how each ecological system supports the academic resilience of Latino students. Previous research has focused on one or two of the ecological systems, limiting the findings that can significantly impact the academic success of Latina students. To close the gap between the lack of research regarding Ecological Systems Theory and academic resilience, it is important to examine the following research questions: (1) How have ecological factors influenced the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school? (2) What do social support providers believe is critical for the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?

The Situation of the Current Study

Existing Gaps in the Body of Knowledge

Having critically reviewed the literature, I have drawn a number of conclusions. First and foremost, there is a large amount of scholarly literature about the general

subject of education attainment amongst various groups. Latinas are among those groups extensively studied related to aspects of education attainment. In general, scholars tend to be in agreement that many achievement gaps exist between Latino students and their white counterparts living in the U.S. (Ojeda, Flores, Meza, & Morales, 2011). In some instances, Latino students achieve less academically when compared to other minority groups of students in the U.S., such as African-Americans (Perez et al., 2009). The introduction of the *No Child Left Behind Act* has not helped, eliminated or even bridged these gaps. If anything, scholars are now identifying more achievement gaps on the basis of other attributes, such as gender, learning disabilities, and English-language proficiency (Rivera & Waxman, 2007). Research has focused on the deficits many Latino students face and have acquired based on their environmental conditions. However, the majority of studies focusing on these deficits do not provide solutions to overcome educational adversities. My study focuses on the academic achievements of Latina students through the lens of ecological theory and their ability to cope with the challenges in their environment, based on direct reports from those who have both experienced and overcome such adversity.

Another pertinent aspect is the role of family and community in a child's educational attainment. The context of a child's ecological experiences determines his or her ability to cope with hindrances to educational attainment. Greater resilience is attributed to children with supportive peers, families, and communities. On the contrary, students facing daily adversity tend to exhibit less resilience. However, available studies on this subject are general and have not narrowly focused on specific variables.

Community is particularly emphasized in the lives of many students, especially in minority communities in the U.S., such as African-Americans and Latinas. So important is the community in support of the family that the African adage, “It takes a village to raise a child,” has been quoted or made reference to in quite a number of studies (Ungar, 2012). Because these groups experience the most educational or academic achievement gaps, their needs are of particular importance when resilience issues are being discussed. The literature indicates that the community has a lead role in a child’s ability to develop resilience.

Educational or academic resilience is covered fairly well in the literature. At the same time, resilience remains a subjective issue, which varies among people of different communities, ethnicities, races, families, and ages, as well as within each of the ethnic or racial groups, or social classes. Each diverse group has various and distinct cultural backgrounds and social conditions that make their lived experiences unique. These different experiences, within the construct of resilience, require studies that clearly control for such variables as ethnic, racial, and social differences. These disparities found in the literature must be addressed to fully understand the experiences Latina students encounter in each of the ecological systems to be academically resilient.

There also are variances in existing literature inappropriately using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory as their study design. Researchers claiming to use Ecological Systems Theory are revealed to be employing only a partial version of Bronfenbrenner’s work.

For example, focusing only on two layers of Ecological Systems does not afford the providers of social support with a complete picture of Latina experiences. Therefore,

when the Ecological Systems Theory is altered and only focuses on contextual factors, the results of the research are incomplete.

This research study goes beyond previous studies referencing individual causes of resilience; it instead shifts focus to the processes leading to academic success. In addition, this study includes all components of the Ecological Systems Theory; considers findings based on this theoretical perspective, and provides direction for future research that would better and more fully incorporate this theory into the process of examining academic resilience of Latina urban high school students.

Conclusion

Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides a foundation that informs the conceptual model for this dissertation. Both the Ecological Systems and resilience theories provide insight into the variables that have been selected for the model. The theory of resilience and the Ecological Systems Theory are both necessary to provide the appropriate framework for understanding the academic achievement of Latina students.

This dissertation addresses the following research questions:

- (1) How have ecological factors influenced the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?
- (2) What do social support providers believe is critical for the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?

It is hypothesized that there will be significant variables within each of the systems with regard to individual student factors. It is thought each of these factors within the systems described will increase the likelihood that schools can replicate their experiences to increase the likelihood of Latina students becoming academically successful.

The next chapter provides an overview of the study's methodology, including model of inquiry, study design, research context and participants, data collection, data analysis, and study limitations.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III presents the qualitative research design used for this research study. The qualitative research methods are described in the following sections: (1) research questions, (2) model of inquiry, (3) research design, (4) research instruments, (5) research context and participants, (6) data collection, (7) data analysis, and (8) study limitations.

Research Questions

This qualitative study investigates ways in which ecological factors contribute to the academic success of urban, college-bound Latina high school students. In addition, it explores the general research questions: (1) How have ecological factors influenced the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school? and (2) What do social support providers believe is critical for the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?

Model of Inquiry

Latino academic resilience in an urban high school is elucidated using the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Patton (2002), qualitative research using an orientation report commences with an explicit theoretical viewpoint that directs fieldwork and interpretation of results. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) enables the researcher to illustrate and interpret the limitations, events, and accomplishments of resilient, urban, Latina high school students based on different perceptions. This method of inquiry goes beyond what past studies have performed by

referencing individual causes of resilience; it shifts analysis towards the processes leading to academic success. Consequently, this study demonstrates why it is the most valuable roadmap for an examination of the high school educational environments that foster the academic resilience of urban, Latina high school students. Based on Bronfenbrenner's model, the focus of resilience research has expanded from identifying characteristics of resilient children to also distinguishing methods that support resiliency (Davey, Eaker, & Walters, 2003).

Research Design

As Smart (2010) posits, qualitative researchers do more than capture reality. They condense, represent, and make reality recognizable by translating and developing knowledgeable arguments. Through qualitative designs, researchers obtain data required for a complete understanding of a problem and for study populations. This study uses multiple-case study methodology to study correlations and casual factors in Latina academic resilience. According to Stake (2006), in multiple-case study research, the single case is of interest due to the fact that it comes from a specific collection of cases. The distinctive cases share a joint condition and feature that includes ecological factors contributing to the academic resilience of Latina students in an urban setting.

The primary merit of using a multiple case study design is that it compares cases in their totality; in addition, one can study numerous elements within identifiable cases. As Yin (2009) posits, qualitative research is useful in (1) contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts, (2) studying the meaning of people's lives under real world conditions, (3) representing the perspectives of study population, and (4) striving to use a multiple source of evidence, instead of relying solely on one source. According to

Yin (2011), a multiple case study is more advantageous than a single case study because it utilizes more cases of evidence and data, and it improves the research and its external validity, both theoretically and factually.

Research Instruments

This sub-section includes an introduction to the researcher, the study and its topic. Furthermore, the importance of the students' participation and its potential to help others find pathways for Latina students in an academic setting is discussed. The role of audio taping individual interviews is outlined, and the researcher's role as an observer and participant is detailed, which served to enrich the reliability and credibility of the research. Without time spent with those in a Latino community, the researcher is skeptically viewed as an outsider (Ojeda et al., 2011). I used primarily interviews and... (give overview of data collection here).

Semi-Structured Interviews

According to Curry, Nembhard, and Badley (2009) and Ojeda et al (2011), interviews capture essential features of a phenomenon, drawn from the participant's perspective and their personal words. The collection and interpretation of data for this study was conducted in compliance with broadly established procedures of sampling, data collection, and analysis. Firm rapport between the participant and interviewer was created to guarantee cultural comfort and trust before any of the main research topics were introduced (McCaffery, 2003). Additionally, the semi-structured, individual interviews took place over an extended period of time in order to elicit further insights. Each question was directly linked to one or more of the four research questions.

Creswell (2009) describes advantages and disadvantages to using interviews for data collection. Benefits of interviews include the researcher's ability to ask specific questions related to the study. Disadvantages, on the other hand, include the inability of participants to clearly articulate their experiences, or they may not feel comfortable discussing their experiences with a researcher. However, this research study found that the descriptive experiences shared by the participants during the interview process were an important advantage and offered insights into the participants' understanding of their academic resilience.

Questions were used to determine what participants thought and felt about their lived experiences (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). During the initial interview sessions, the researcher used interview guides to provide students with a thematic focus. This eliminated the task of organizing and analyzing interview data during the analysis process (Patton, 2015).

To insure trustworthiness, the interview questions were first used in a pilot study with two of the participants. They were asked to evaluate the questions and share their opinions. Consequently, they were able to provide feedback about whether the questions were suitable and to propose any adjustments to the interview questions.

By means of the participants' own words, based on the students' own words, I developed insights into how they interpreted the life experience factors that led to their academic resilience during high school (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). These interviews, with the consent of the participant, were recorded and then transcribed by University Transcription Services in Chicago. Participants were asked to review the transcribed interview and verify the accuracy of the information gathered, including the accuracy of

interpretation of important themes (Mirriam, 2009). Each participant was asked the same general questions and all interviews were conducted in a similar manner. The resulting data was then analyzed.

Interviews with Social Support Providers

Social support is a multi-dimensional construct, consisting of attitude transmission, instrumental resistance, psychological and emotional support, physical and instrumental assistance, and resource and information sharing (Duns, Trivette, & Cross, 2002). A recent study found that this support can successfully emanate from adults across the multiple microsystems youth inhabit, including adults at home, at school, and in the community (Rose, Woolley, & Bowen, 2009). Therefore, academic success is significantly influenced by social relationships with adults throughout the numerous environments in which students engage. All adults who have positions of responsibility in the lives of the youth, therefore, are obligated to help foster academic achievement. . This includes but is not limited to the adults who support, parent, mentor, and cultivate young people; adults who offer learning chances both inside and outside of school, or adults who influence academic policy decisions that affect the youths' social environment.

Following the first round of interviews, the six students interviewed for this study provided contact information for at least two people in their lives who had been instrumental in fostering their academic success. The social support providers were informed of the study (see Appendix F) via email, followed by a telephone call, or mailed letter containing additional information about the research study. They were given the researcher's contact information, recruitment letter, and consent letter.

The social support providers who agreed to participate in the study were asked to schedule an interview with the researcher at a convenient time and location. Support providers also had the option to conduct the interview via telephone. Consideration was given to selecting a quiet, comfortable location that was convenient for the participant, yet free from interruptions.

A predetermined set of questions was developed to corroborate and add details to the information already provided by student participants. . The questions were based on the students' perceptions of the impact their social support providers had had on their academic success (see Appendix 1).

Field Notes

The collected and maintained material for this study included reflective journals and field notes based on the information gathered from the participants' fact sheets, as well as from the researcher's observations. The reflective comments included the working hypothesis, speculations, reactions, initial interpretations, researcher's feelings, and hunches (Merriam, 2009). The journals also served as a warehouse for the documentation of researcher prejudices and thought processes prior to, throughout, and following each interview meeting (Schwandt, 2005).

Merriam (2009) states the contents of field notes usually include the following: (1) verbal explanation of the activities; the setting and the people of the setting; the people, and the activities, (2) direct quotations or at least the substance of what people said, (3) observer's comments (OC).

Research Context and Participants

The students interviewed for this study attended Hamilton High School, a pseudonym for an urban, public high school located in Chicago, IL. This school was chosen because of its large percentage of Latino students and the compliance of those participating. The total enrollment at this school is 1,365 students. Presently, Hamilton's ethnic composition is 74.03% Latino, 9.89% African-American, 6.69% Asian-American, and 6.39% European-American or white. Of the total female population at the school, 94% are Latina. Furthermore, 96.9% of all students at Hamilton are from low-income families. Therefore, this qualifies students to receive free or reduced-fee lunch. According to the school's website, 58.6% of the students attending this urban high school graduated with an overall average ACT score of 15.6%, slightly less than four points below the national average.

In order to identify, analyze, and study information-rich cases at Hamilton, I used a decisive sampling approach that meets the predetermined criteria of academic resilience. The power and logic of decisive sampling is based on choosing cases that are rich with information for study (Patton, 2000). Patton further claims useful cases are those from which an individual can discover issues of profound significance from those who have lived them and determine common traits that may resolve, deter, or guide solutions.

Acquiring official entrance to research sites and access to potential participants was unique to each student. As Berg (2001) posits, researchers should learn the social organization of the site of research to fruitfully bargain entry. Prior to conducting this study, an application was sent to the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) at Loyola

University of Chicago. Once approval was obtained, the proposal was sent to the Board of Education for data collection at Hamilton.

Based on the approval of both institutions, the researcher asked Hamilton's gatekeepers, consisting of the guidance counselor and principal, to team up to help locate Latina senior high school students who fit the study's description of academic resilience. The guidance counselor and principal provided demographic information from their database reflecting the characteristics of academically-resilient, college-bound Latina students. The gatekeepers retained sole access to the students' academic information, and were given the authority to nominate six students who fulfilled the criteria. The gatekeepers provided details about potential participation in the research study to six students who met the outlined criteria. They also gave the students the recruitment letter, parent consent letter, and assent letter.

Students interested in participating in the study contacted the researcher via email. Of the six initially invited to participate, four academically resilient students agreed to participate in this research study. For this qualitative research, I four, college-bound Latina high school students were interviewed to discover the socio-ecological factors that played a role in their academic resilience. The chosen students meeting the criteria were asked to share the names of no less than two people who fostered their academic success during their time in school. In sum, a total of eight participants (four college-bound students and four social support providers) participated in this research study.

Data Collection

The researcher has been a first-hand observer of how the lack of development within the Latino communities of protective processes in each of the ecological

paradigms has hindered the academic improvement and engagement of students. As an educator and doctoral student, the researcher strongly believes that not using systemic ecological factors as a guide to help students to become academically resilient has resulted in a significant omission in student achievement in secondary school grades. Through this research study, work with students, teachers, administrators and parents has provided the opportunity to study and document the impact of applying each of the ecological systems, and the support necessary to positively guide students to become resilient students.

An integral characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher functions as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). An effective interviewer must be an expert in the topic of the interview, as well as in the technique of interviewing and human interaction. The first level of this research required individual interviews, which were audiotaped. The researcher was able to learn about the students' experiences through their stories. After the interviews, participants were able to review transcripts and field notes and correct errors or challenge what they perceived to be the researcher's misperceptions. This led to improved accuracy, credibility and validity of what was recorded during the interview.

Additionally, triangulation data collection techniques were utilized to ensure accuracy of findings. Data collection included the instruments used to collect data and the actual procedure used to collect the data. Three instruments were used for data collection: (1) semi-structured interviews with individual college-bound Latina students, (2) four questions for social support providers, and (3) field notes.

Before students agreed to participate, the researcher verbally shared expectations of participants and the researcher. The participants were then sent a letter via email to confirm their participation. That email contained an informed consent letter, which further outlined the study and noted that the interviews would be audiotaped, and a parental consent form. A short, demographical survey designed by the researcher also was included in the email. The students were asked to bring to the first session the signed consent form and the contact information for at least two individuals in their lives considered important sources of support. They also were informed that the results of this study potentially would be used to assist future Latina high school students who fit the profile of a resilient student, so that he/she could receive the guidance and support necessary to develop academic resilience.

During the initial meeting with the individual student, the participants received a printed copy of the informed consent for their own records, as well as contact information for the principal researcher and her supervisor. Follow-up with the student participants occurred within one week of the initial meeting to schedule the interview at Hamilton High School.

The interview was also a 45 minute, individual session. As verification of the scheduled interview, the researcher sent an e-mail (see Appendix E) to each potential student participant with the date, day, time and location of the scheduled interviews.

The research interviews were all conducted in an environment that was comfortable and appropriate for each interviewee. At the beginning of each interview, I thanked the student for volunteering to participate in this study. The researcher also confirmed that the participant had signed and returned the informed parental consent

form and assent form, indicating that the interview would be audiotaped, and verbally reaffirmed that the tapes would be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

To protect the confidentiality of the participants, a random number was assigned to and written on the consent form, and the form was placed in a manila envelope with the assigned number. The manila envelope was locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home. The randomly assigned number was the only identifying factor associated with the participant for the remainder of the study.

Before commencing the interview, a reminder was given to the participant that at any time he/she felt uncomfortable and wished to take a break or stop the interview altogether, the researcher would immediately end the interview. The participant also was reminded that the interview was estimated to take 45 minutes and that a break could be given at any time.

During the interview, the researcher noted nonverbal cues and voice tone of participant and included this information as part of the data collection. Every interview was conducted until the researcher felt the participant had fully expressed his/her ideas, thoughts and feelings regarding ecological factors contributing to academic resilience.

Every interview also concluded with asking the participant the following question: "Is there anything else that you think is important to talk about?" to address issues of authenticity in qualitative research. At the end of each individual session, the researcher sent the recording to the transcription service and saved it in a Microsoft Word document. Each transcription was sent as an email attachment to the appropriate interviewee for review, comment, and correction, to ensure adequate representation of the ideas and comments.

Afterwards, the students received a thank you letter and a proposal to ask follow-up questions (see Appendix J). The participants in this study were asked to provide the names of two individuals in their lives who had been instrumental in helping them succeed academically. These individuals could be family members, teachers, staff, or community members. Participants were required to give each of their social support providers the social support recruitment letter to solicit their participation in the study.

Social support providers who were reported to be interested in participating in the study were contacted by the researcher via email. Social support provider participants then received an email informing them that he/she had been noted as being integral to the academic success of a participant in the research study. The email requested their participation in a 20-minute interview and a consent form was attached.

The goal of the interviews with the social support providers was to gauge the differences or similarities between the student experiences and the experience of the social support provider. The research study also sought to capture the unique lens through which social support providers viewed the Latina students' experiences throughout their academic career.

In order to capture this unique viewpoint, social support providers were informed that their written responses to the prepared questionnaire should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Support providers also were given the option to have the interview conducted via telephone. The researcher informed the social support provider that any electronic communication created to prepare for the interview would be destroyed within one year of the commencement of the research study.

Over the course of the written correspondence with the social support providers, the researcher either asked for additional details or asked follow-up questions in order to get a complete picture of the providers' contributions to the students' academic resilience.

Data Analysis

Research criteria require that several stages be developed to ensure data are analyzed and interpreted in accordance with recognized procedures and norms (Creswell, 2009). First, data are organized by transcribing interviews and organizing different sources of data in groups. This stage was performed during the first review of the transcripts in order for the researcher to become familiar with the content. Next, the researcher thoroughly read all of the data a second time to gain deeper insight concerning the tone of the information communicated.

During this second reading, the researcher developed codes that began to emerge from the interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Once the codes were established, the researcher developed themes that were used to explain the study's findings.

Thematic analysis is another way to categorize qualitative data—from a problem to be investigated, analyzed and described in a systematic way so that interpretations and meanings can be made (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Upon completing the second reading of transcripts, the researcher assigns numbers to each participant and uses these assigned numbers to identify quotes that supports identified themes. The final step of data analysis consists of the interpretation of the data. The objective of this step is to make meaning of the data and, for this study, to discuss the implications of how ecological factors impact the academic resilience of Latina students.

In any research study, validity and trustworthiness are of great concern.

Trustworthiness has two distinct characteristics that include: (1) results that are consistent over time and (2) whether the study can be replicated. Prepared topic-based interview questions were developed throughout the interview process to ensure there was no differentiation from the first interview to the last. Profiles of students, individual interviews, and social support provider interviews were transcribed to ensure that all themes were supported by data in order to provide explicit interpretation with the use of quotes, phrases, and terminology communicated by the participant (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The process of looking for repetitive words, phrases, and concepts guided in the development of themes related to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).

Validity means that a study has accurately measured what it set out to measure and the results are truthfully supported by evidence (Schwandt, 2005). In this study, triangulation was implemented to ensure its validity. Triangulation is a research procedure using various sources of information to find common themes among them (Creswell, 2009).

In this study a great number of sources and participants for data collection increased the degree of validity of the research. Giving participants the ability to read their transcripts and clarify or edit their responses positively impacted the authenticity of this study. Further, feedback from participants provided an opportunity to determine and understand what the researcher interpreted during the interview process, as well as correct errors and challenge wrong interpretations. The researcher acknowledged the participants' descriptions as recorded; this in and of itself was a factor impacting validity.

The researcher summarized the study's findings based on the participants' lived experiences of academic resilience so that the reader would have the opportunity to connect with these narratives through the lens of his/her own experience. This is the final test of validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

Organization of the Findings

This research study was conducted at an urban Chicago Public School neighborhood school, and is referred to in this study as Hamilton, a pseudonym. The criteria for student participants were being Latina and college-bound students, in order to help the researcher determine how these students became academically resilient. A case study was used in order to gain a better understanding of what these students actually achieved, and to understand how these actions contributed to their academic success and resilience (Yin, 2009).

The major themes of this research study were culled from the data gathered from the four student participants and four social support providers, who discussed their relationships with student participants. The research determined that social support providers were essential to the student's efforts to improve academic achievement. Having to meet the additional expectations of the social support providers also increased the college readiness of these underserved students.

There were significant methods of support provided to students during their academic experiences at Hamilton. The support and the themes that emerged from the study were then used to answer the two research questions. The researcher coded and analyzed the data using Hyper Research 3.7 qualitative computer software.

Study Limitations

The purpose of this study was to explore the ecological systems that contributed to the academic resilience of Latina students. Interviews were conducted to capture rich descriptive data of the lived experiences of this specific population. Study limitations concerned the ability to generalize the findings to other settings. The purpose of qualitative case studies is to develop an understanding of themes as they are experienced in a particular setting (Yin, 2009). The differences in the participants, setting, and data collection affect the potential to generalize the results of this study to other settings.

This study interviewed four, college-bound Latina students as the basis for analysis of ecological systems that contributed to academic resilience. It is conceivable the Latina students in this study do not represent the lived experiences of other Latina students. Study participants do not represent all of the umbrella groups in the U.S. of Latin American descent. Therefore, it makes it difficult to generalize the findings of this study to other schools that do share the same demographics.

Case studies are highly valued for expanding our understanding of individuals and conditions, while opening new paths for research. A case study is an in-depth manner of understanding a research subject's lived experience, especially a complex one. Transferring the findings of this study to another school setting can be achieved if the researcher provides enough details that readers can conclude the findings are relevant to other schools with similar traits (Stake, 2005). Thus, despite the limitations of the case study, they remain a very useful method for educational research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the qualitative research methods used to study Latina high school student resilience at Hamilton High School are outlined. Four student case studies were developed as the result of responses to an in-depth, individual interview process created for the study. During data analysis, significant factors materialized that appeared to explain the student's personal and academic development, as well as their resiliency. In this way, the researcher was able to construct case studies using Ecological Systems Theory as the theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This includes: (1) individual factors involving intrinsic characteristics, (2) microsystem factors of the students' family and (3) exosystem factors in the participants' environments in schools and communities. These factors contributed significantly to promote educational resilience throughout the lived experiences of these students.

The case narratives address two research questions:

- (1) How have ecological factors influence the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?
- (2) What do social support providers believe is critical for the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?

CHAPTER IV

PROFILES OF ACADEMIC RESILIENCE

This case study focused on the experiences of four, academically resilient Latina high school students examining both the internal and external factors and processes these students utilized in order to overcome adversity. It is based on the work of the community of resilience researchers, who subscribe to the premise that resilience can be developed and fostered through social supports and nurturing individuals, specifically those created by these Latina students through ecological pathways.

For the purposes of this study, the names used to identify them and their social support providers, as well as the name of their school and social service organizations, are all pseudonyms.

As these young women shared their experiences, they disclosed personal struggles they had to overcome while attempting to reach the goal of completing high school and attending college. Once approached to participate in the study based on recommendations from school counselors, the students welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences as an example of an academically resilient and successful high school student.

The following profiles of the young women are based on the transcribed interviews. The interviews focus on the challenges faced in route to achieving their academic success. Each story includes the specific issues and challenges these students confronted and had to overcome in order to change the trajectory of their individual lives.

Although they experienced varying degrees of economic difficulty, family issues, mental illness (such as clinically diagnosed depression) and bullying, the young women also shared how they were able to transform their anguishing circumstances into motivation to face their adversity and persevere. In each situation, there were internal and external protective factors that influenced their academic performance and supported their academic resilience and subsequent achievements.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants	Age	Gender	Country of Origin	Citizen Status	Family Unit	Siblings	American Education
Marianna	17	F	America	U.S.	Dual	5	k-12
Uma	17	F	Mexico	1 st Generation Non-citizen	Single	2	11-12
Nadia	17	F	Mexico	1 st Generation Non-citizen	Single	1	11-12
Yesenia	18	F	America	U.S.	Dual	1	k-12

Case 1: Marianna

My cousins and all of them, they didn't go to college. So, I'm basically the first one to go to college out of the whole family. (Interview, May 26, 2015)

Marianna is an 18-year old, Latina high school senior, who will be the first in her family to attend college next fall. Marianna has a reputation at her school for having a cheery disposition. She is the youngest of six children born in Chicago to parents who emigrated from Mexico.

Marianna grew up in the Albany Park neighborhood and has attended Hamilton High School since freshman year. Currently, she lives with her parents and one other sibling, a brother, who also contributes financially to the household.

Marianna's mother dropped out of school in sixth grade, and her father dropped out in eighth grade. None of her siblings attended college, including a sister who dropped out of school at the age of 15 to get married and have a child.

Marianna told me that it is difficult to spend quality time with her parents since her father has a full time job as a construction worker and her mother works two jobs as a cook. Marianna also explained that financial stressors also impact her relationship with her parents. But she knows they love her and do what they can to keep her happy. She told me she is pursuing higher education in an effort to fend off having to struggle financially the way she has witnessed her family struggle. Marianna shared:

Like I said, my mom works two jobs and then I don't see her the whole day. Just seeing that, I don't want that for my kids. Don't get me wrong, my mom loves me and everything, but I would like to spend more time with her. But I know she works because she needs to provide for us. Just seeing that, it just motivates me to do better. I'm like, 'Okay, if I get a better future, I could help her and then my life would be better with my kids, if ever I have kids.'

At the age of 12, when she was in middle school, Marianna's cousin and best friend, Karla, died as the result of an extended illness. Unable to cope with the loss, Marianna said she began engaging in self-injuring behavior to release emotional pain. This practice continued when she started attending high school. Because it was easy to conceal beneath her clothing, Marianna's parents did not notice.

Once Marianna began high school, she said the need to continue the self-injuring became more prevalent, and it was all she thought about doing. She continued to mask her behavior from her parents by performing well academically. Ultimately, she said, the secrecy and guilt affected her relationships with her high school friends and impacted the way she felt about herself.

Marianna became angry and isolated from the rest of her peers. A friend at school noticed the radical change in her behavior and convinced Marianna to confide in an adult at school. Marianna shared how she reached out to her guidance counselor to help her stop the self-injuring.

I went to Mr. Smith because I trusted him, and thanks to him I stopped. School was very helpful not only because the staff there was helping me get better, but because when I needed a distraction I knew I could rely on all the homework I was given. However, I stopped self-harming and I continued to do great in school; (not) for my parents (or) teachers, but for me. I now know that my education is what's going to help me have a better future and I cherish every moment of it.

Marianna shared that she saw her guidance counselor weekly and received counseling regarding her inability to communicate her feelings. He also insisted that she take part in after-school clubs and social programs in order to better understand that she was not alone in her experience. Marianna said these additional activities led her to become active at school and she found other students who opened up about their troubles.

Although Marianna continued receiving guidance from her counselors, she still had to overcome several obstacles, including limited availability of resources at school.

She said Hamilton was severely underfunded, compared to magnet schools in wealthier communities of Chicago. It was Marianna's view that her high school was considered low-performing, which limited the academic and enrichment opportunities available to students at Hamilton. Still, she was enthusiastic and appreciative when her teachers attempted to fill the gaps:

We're not a rich school. They [teachers] provide a lot of things for us...like calculators—we recently got calculators this year; the new ones and they've been really helpful! I took the college portion of math [standardized tests] and the calculators helped us a lot to pass the final [exam] and everything. And then we've got new computers from a school loan, I think, which helped us with the portfolios [for] English class.

Marianna also experienced economic difficulty at home. She lacked some of the essential resources students her age need in order to succeed academically. For example, having a home computer and printer were luxuries her parents were unable to afford during Marianna's early years at high school. When her brother saw Marianna spending time at the local library in order to print her schoolwork, he saved money to help her::

Well, I [now] have internet at home. My brother is the one [who] pays [for] it and he bought me a printer, too, to make it easier for me to print out essays. [My brother] bought me a laptop computer, too.

During her high school years, Marianna experienced many of the same financial and psychological hardships other classmates her age endured. Despite her personal hardships, Marianna told me she also wanted to help others. For example, she often volunteered to help her classmates, serving as an interpreter between their Spanish-

speaking parents and their teachers. She told me she planned to major in Psychology in college in order to fulfill her dream of helping others, especially those who have had the same experiences she endured.

Table 2

Participant Profile

Marianna	Profile
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Educational Attainment • Financial Stressors • Death of cousin • Self-Harming <p style="text-align: right;">Violent Neighborhood Limited Resources</p>
Individual Protective Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused and Driven
Ecological Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familial: supportive and motivating parents and kin. • School: supportive and encouraging school staff and guidance counselors • School involvement • School Leadership

Marianna's Protective Processes

Individual factors.

Focused and driven. According to her school advisors, Marianna pushed herself to excel academically, and they attributed Marianna's drive to succeed to as being responsible for the achievement of her academic goals. She often expressed her determination to earn top grades in order to continue as a member of the National Honor Society (NHS). As the result of being placed in honor courses, Marianna was able to remain steadfast and focused on completing assignments. She said she worked twice as hard to keep up with the expectations required by that coursework.

Well, NHS, that one makes me do better because we're kicked out of that club if we have a 'C' or lower. So knowing that, I'm like, 'Oh okay, I got to do my best.'

Either way, I don't aim for 'Bs' or 'Cs;' I aim for 'As.' That's how NHS helped me. The other clubs, well, I don't know.

Marianna reported that she had to accomplish her academic goals in order to succeed in life. She also made clear that she did well and enjoyed school because she wanted a better future.

Well, honestly, because I try my best. I see how my mom is and I don't want to end up like her—I mean, her life isn't horrible. But I just want to do much, much better. I just push myself to do better and my teachers helped me a lot, too.

When I asked additional questions about her aspirations for the future, Marianna stated:

I want to be a psychologist. So knowing that—that I could help people—that's going to be good. Not just that, but I could help my parents, too.

Her thoughts about being academically successful were repeatedly expressed during the interview. She characterized her experiences at Hamilton as positive and how it helped her to be able to discuss her achievements with her family:

It's really good since I'm the one that's more academically successful - I'm not saying that my brothers or my sister, are stupid [chuckles]. I go to them and I tell them, 'Oh, I got this in school.' When I joined NHS, they didn't know what that was, so sometimes it's hard to talk to them about it because it's like their first time going through it, too. But then it's good because they understand that I'm doing good and they're happy with that. It's really easy to talk to them.

Based upon the work she had already accomplished during her academic career in high school, Marianna said she envisioned a positive future for herself.

Her guidance counselor, Mr. Smith, was a key social support provider. He described Marianna:

Marianna's success in school [was] due to her determination to become something and do something greater. She showed that from the very beginning as a freshman who would advocate for herself and, though shy at first, [she spoke up] when she felt it necessary. Marianna does have a genuine interest in learning more and being more informed. When she encountered anything she could not quickly grasp she would ask a lot of questions and she would question how other students got to the responses they produced. These are qualities that make Maria an involved and engaged learner, which led to her success.

Marianna said she was acutely aware of the challenges of starting college. But she also noted that those challenges would not deter her from completing her goal of earning a college degree:

If the [classes] are challenging then I got to ask for help, I can't just give up. I will go to the professor and [say], 'I'm sorry but I need help, can you go over this?' Like I said, I'm going to have friends over there, maybe I could ask them to help me since they already went through it.

Marianna's high school experience helped her understand the value of academic achievement, and this allowed her to envision a successful future for herself through higher education. She was committed to flourishing academically, despite circumstances that often negatively impacted Latinas.

Familial factors.

Supportive and motivating parents and kin. According to Marianna, her bilingual parents always played an important role in her academic success. Although her parents were unable to assist her in academic assignments due to their limited educational background, their consistent involvement in and encouragement of her studies was demonstrated daily. Marianna said he always requested to know what she was learning at school.

Yeah, when they [my parents] see me doing my homework, they're like, 'Oh, what are you learning in class?' They try to be involved; even though they don't understand everything, they still try to be there.

Even though her parents did not complete their education, they knew that their daughter had to attend college; it was the only way for Marianna to have a better life than theirs.

My parents telling me that there's going to be a positive outcome in the future, it just motivates me and makes me happy like, 'Oh, okay.'

Marianna not only received encouragement from her parents, but also from her cousins who were close to her in age. Her cousins encouraged her by pointing out, based on their first-hand experiences, the consequences of making bad decisions, including not getting an education:

No, I have cousins that they tell me to—because basically, my whole family, they didn't go to college. My cousins and all of them, they didn't go to college. So I'm basically, the first one to go to college out of the whole family. So they pushed me, too, they tell me, 'Oh, yeah, keep going. You're doing good right now. You

don't want to end up like me, like I have two kids.' So I think it's everybody in my family that sort of makes me want to succeed in school.

Marianna also was constantly reminded by her brother of the family's high expectations for her to succeed academically. Her brother's financial support and scrutiny made Marianna realize her potential to excel, but she also noted that she did not want to disappoint him:

A positive thing, yes. They push me to do better. They know that if I continue in school that it's going to help me a lot. They're the ones pushing me to go to college, my brother - especially my oldest brother - he's the one that tells me. He gets mad at me, if I get one 'B.' He gets mad at me but he only does that because he cares and he knows that I could get straight 'A's.' And I have managed to get straight 'A's,' so it's understandable.

Marianna knew that based on her family's support she had a great deal to prove in order to meet their expectations of becoming the first member of her family to earn a college degree.

Environmental factors.

Supportive and encouraging school staff. Marianna relied on the assistance she received from counselors and teachers at school. She said it kept her on track to achieve her goal of graduating from high school and attending college. Marianna had individuals around her who took an interest in her academic achievements and future college goals. She felt very fortunate that there were educators and counselors vested in her success. Among her support group were some of her teachers, guidance counselors, and academic peers. She felt that having supportive teachers was essential.

Mr. Smith. He's the one that got me into the college class, the English college class, because I took college classes over the summer and this year, too, the school year. And I just feel like my writing has improved because over the summer the professor was like, 'Oh, your writing is really good. Who is your teacher?' And I'm like, 'Yeah [chuckles]!' He's been very, very helpful. He's prepared us for college too, and he tells us, 'Oh, don't do this. Turn this on time and blah, blah, blah.'

Seeking her counselor's assistance to help end the self-injuring behavior also was an important time in Marianna's life. She said she now realized the importance of this intervention, which would allow her to continue her path towards academic achievement.

Guidance counselor or--well, freshman year, I had a counselor (who) helped me a lot. She helped me with family problems and personal issues. She helped me get through the year like she would talk to me and make me better.....

Marianna recognized the importance of having guidance counselors who would not only encourage her, but who also would assist her in navigating the college process. Marianna met with her guidance counselor to discuss her college applications and what steps she should be taking.

Mrs. Jones. Because I applied [to] Northeastern and I haven't received my award letter, so she's the one that's always pushing me, 'Marianna, call this. Marianna, you got to ask them. Marianna, Marianna, this and that.' I'm like, 'Oh, my God,' and she's like, 'If I weren't here who was going to push you?' I'm like, 'That's true, that's true.'

The college and career coach took the initiative to take charge of the complicated paperwork and red tape many students at Hamilton were unfamiliar with completing. Her coach was very hands-on, which Marinna believed made the college application process much easier to understand.

A lot from my college and career coach, he's been very helpful, Mr. Harris. He informs us of scholarships; he was the one who set up for the open house for the colleges to come and then we went around. He made it mandatory, which was good because then all the seniors [had to] go. Because I know if he didn't make it mandatory then not a lot of seniors [would] then be going to look at those schools, so he helped a lot with that. He provides us information about the schools that we're going to attend; he sends our transcripts from all of that.

The additional support outside of the classroom was invaluable for Marianna; she realized that while it was important to do well academically, connecting to supportive and encouraging school staff was also critical to her success. Her guidance counselor, a social support provider, became an important external protective factor. Mr. Harris stated the following about Marianna:

A big part of what has helped students like Marianna is allowing them to have an outlet for expressing those concerns over adversity and risk. The step beyond for us as adults is to be able to validate and legitimize these concerns for young people rather than simply ask them to 'get over it.' A lot of what happened with Marianna sitting down and being able to speak about the problems and contextualize it, make it visible, and then find ways to overcome it. Overcoming

it for many students may mean realizing that academics and academic success are the way to escape or improve the risks and setbacks that they face regularly.

School involvement. As a result of her positive experiences with school staff, Marianna decided that she wanted to change the school climate. She became involved in student organizations and programs that involved building self-awareness and self-esteem. Consequently, Marianna not only took advantage of the available resources but she said she also began to take on leadership roles.

I joined Gay-Straight Alliance [G.S.A] because in 7th grade I had a friend who was lesbian. Her name was Ruby. She had a best friend and her best friend stopped talking to her when she found out that Ruby was a lesbian. I found it unfair that someone could stop talking to someone else just because of his or her sexuality. So I joined G.S.A to try and help others who go through similar situations. Being a part of G.S.A has made my experience at Hamilton memorable. I have heard the stories of students and I have also heard the stories of teachers of how they came out to their parents and their experiences. G.S.A has also brought many students together to stand and support those who still need to come out to their parents and even to themselves.

Marianna realized the difficult obstacles many of her peers had faced upon entering high school. She also took it upon herself to take action and participate in the Peace Club where students practice “paying it forward” in an effort to acknowledge and demonstrate that they value their fellow peers.

Basically, a group of kids, we just get together and we try to come up with anything positive, anything that helps the school. I remember last year - I think it

was last year - we got together and we wrote sticky notes with positive phrases or positive words that said, 'Keep smiling' or 'You're awesome,' and we put them around the whole school and everybody's locker. So the next day, when students came to school, some of them--you could see it, because they were sad, but once they saw the post-it, they had a smile on their faces so that was our main goal.

Leadership role. Marianna actively engaged in academic and non-academic functions. Marianna not only maintained her academic work but was willing to take a leadership role in various, extra-curricular activities.

I'm a leader for the history group. Well, for the history group, we take pictures the whole year and then make a video and show them. I'm in the Gay-Straight Alliance, I'm in Spanish Club, Peer Conference, Peace Club.

Marianna immersed herself in various school organizations that allowed her to continue to make connections with her peers. Her preferred experiences involved helping others, and this permitted her to become fully engaged within her high school environment

Summary of Marianna's Academic Resilience

Marianna's pathway to academic resilience resulted from being exposed to various protective factors within her home and school. The protective factors present included an array of caring and helpful individuals, from supportive and engaged family members to caring school officials. Throughout her educational experience at Hamilton High School, positive and motivational teachers, staff and peers connected with Marianna. At the same time, Marianna shared the internal protective factors that pushed her academically—wanting a better life than her parents; reaction to the counseling and support she received in school, and the desire to not disappoint family members who

were financially and emotionally vested in her success. All of the protective factors working in conjunction with each other contributed to Marianna's academic resilience and successful attrition to college.

Case 2: Uma

My thoughts about education have been positively formed because of what my mother has taught me since I was a child. (Interview, June 6, 2015)

Uma grew up in Mexico with her parents, and she is the eldest of three sisters. Neither her father nor her mother completed elementary school while growing up in Mexico, because they were pressured to work and contribute financially to their families.

[My mother] never had an opportunity to go to school because she had to help my grandparents by working so she could [help them to] feed my uncles. She says going to school will give me a better future and that education will sustain me throughout my life.

Uma told me that both her mother and one of her sisters were diagnosed with clinical depression and have undergone medical treatments. The depression has impacted her mother's ability to work and her sister's ability to finish her education. She said her father cited her mother's depression as the reason he filed for divorce when Uma was 16 years old. Not too long after her parents split up, Uma's mother decided that it was in her daughter's best interest to move to the United States to go to school. She wanted Uma to have the academic advantages the American educational system had to offer. Uma moved to the United States and lives with her mother's sister.

Although Uma resided in her aunt's home, she was still expected to pay rent and pay for her own food. Uma's aunt worked two jobs, and they seldom discussed her

studies. Recently, Uma was informed that her aunt had filed for divorce. Consequently, her financial responsibilities at her aunt's home would be increasing. Uma began to work in excess of forty hours a week, while still going to high school and juggling her studies

Uma developed a close bond with Mrs. Sanchez, a neighbor who also immigrated alone to the U.S.. During the interview, Mrs. Sanchez provided insightful information about the experiences she had in common with Uma's when she first moved to the U.S. Mrs. Sanchez realized the importance of providing Uma with guidance and encouragement that would help her prevail over the loneliness she was experiencing.

The way I have helped Uma [was] by encouraging her; by telling her stories of those who have succeeded, and telling her that life is difficult but she needs to look towards the future.

Uma chose Mrs. Sanchez as a social support provider who positively influenced her academic success and encouraged her to overcome multiple barriers to succeed at school—she didn't know

One of the biggest barriers was language. Uma said she was determined to learn English as soon as possible by applying herself in English Language Learner (ELL) courses offered at her school.

Yes, my ELL teacher helped me so much when I arrived. It was very different but the most difficult thing was the English language. She helped me so much with vocabulary and her perspective on how to teach new students. I was very comfortable with how she taught me.

Language, economic disadvantage, and loneliness were just a few of the challenges Uma said she endured while pursuing her education. Developing a close bond with Mrs.

Sanchez was one of the external protective factors that helped Uma to overcome adversity.

Table 3

Participant Profile

Uma	Profile
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental Educational Attainment • Divorce • ELL • Mother and sister's mental illness • Poverty
Individual Protective Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learned responsibility and self-discipline • Role model
Ecological Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familial factors. Grandmother, mother, and daughter relationships • School factors. Teacher and guidance counselors • Community involvement • Peer Support

Uma's Protective Processes

Individual factors.

Learned responsibility and self-discipline. Growing up in Mexico, Uma said she was taught at a very young age the meaning of responsibility and discipline. In Mexico, she grew up on a farm where work always needed to be done and all hands were required, no matter how young. Uma learned to feed the animals, use tools, and do anything else necessary to help her family. She woke up early, completed her chores and then attended school. Along with self-discipline, Uma said she continued the work ethic that she established at a very young age, when she got to high school in the United States.

I believe that discipline goes hand in hand with sacrifice because you know what you truly want to do with your life.

Pursuing a college education was a priority for Uma, and she enjoyed attending Hamilton High School. She said she found school interesting and made certain to perform to the best of her ability. She knew the class work would be difficult but Uma said she was determined not to let that challenge prevent her from graduating high school and being accepted to college.

Although Uma faced academic challenges in the areas of English and mathematics, she still earned outstanding grades, receiving only 'A's' and 'B's.' She set high standards for herself, and whenever she doubted her ability, she was motivated once again by recalling the talks she had had during her formative years with her mother and grandmother.

The teachings and wisdom of my mom and grandma always influences me, especially when I have great challenges to meet, or when I feel I am doing things wrong with respect to any school activity. I truly feel really that within sacrifice, love and devotion you do things or activities that will make you have better success. As a result you will feel very good about yourself and look that all your effort was worth it.

Uma understood that financing her education would be one of her biggest obstacles, but she did not give up. She used this obstacle as a way to motivate herself to work harder. Uma decided to save money on tuition payments by first attending a community college to complete her required courses, with the hope of transferring to a four-year university at a later time.

I have been working more hours this year. So far, I have saved \$2,000 for tuition.

I have also been able to save for a new computer and provide money for my mother.

Uma's ability to view financial impediments as a temporary hindrance supported her academic success. She approached her high school challenges with the same attitude, which continued to motivate her to succeed throughout high school.

Role model. Uma talked about the strength of the women in her family and the support they always provided her. She felt it was her responsibility to serve as a role model for her family.

I feel with everything that I have learned at school I can also help my family and my grandmother. I plan on learning the process of getting them the appropriate papers to come to this country and live with me.

Uma believes being a role model is the best approach to motivating others to achieve; it is important not just for her family, but also for other students with similar backgrounds for whom she could serve as a role model. While at Hamilton, Uma decided to become a high school teacher so she that she would be able to help future students see their potential and guide them towards their academic goals.

I believe that this case it has helped me in deciding my future plans to study in college. Thankfully I have decided to study to become a high school teacher. I think what Latina students and all students need to do well is to have good tutors, teachers and discipline.

Uma found helping others very satisfying, and believed earning a college degree would help expand her potential to do so much more.

Familial factors.

Grandmother, mother, and daughter relationships. Uma described having a positive relationship with her grandmother and mother while growing up in Mexico. She reported being comforted by the emotional support and parental guidance she received during her school years, as well as during the transition to Chicago. In addition, as a child, Uma learned to become a caretaker for her grandmother and parents. Her efforts contributed significantly to the well-being and survival of her family. She believes the childhood responsibilities she had were the genesis of her resilience. The close bond between family members provided Uma the support to continue to push forward and succeed academically.

In my house, particularly, the conviction that my mother and my grandmother have always made me believe that education is the best way of life. They always said that education is the most precious treasure that will stay with you your whole life and that nobody will be able to take that away from us because it is something that we must fight for.

Uma's mother and grandmother used the example of their own lives to inspire Uma to continue her education. Uma said this factor indeed motivated her to succeed academically, in part, out of the desire to lead a different life than her grandmother and mother. Uma viewed their struggles as key examples of what she did not want her own life to become.

I think what I have seen the most is how my parents and grandmother work so hard. My grandmother would always say that you have no better future without an

education and if I have an opportunity to learn something that I should take that opportunity.

Uma also observed that other youth her age, who had far fewer problems in their lives, did nothing with all of the support they received. She believed that growing up with the support of her mother and grandmother, even in a family faced with hardships, prepared her to take on any other obstacles she might face.

I believe I am constantly changing as I go through my life. I have witnessed people that have been given so many opportunities and have never experienced any hardships and they do nothing with their [lives]. My mother and grandmother have always given me great responsibilities and I believe that has changed the outcome of my life.

Uma recognized the relationships with her grandmother and mother as significant to her academic success.

Environmental factors.

Teacher and counselors. Uma named individuals in the school environment whom she believed impacted her academic achievement. Uma chose her teacher, Mrs. Lizer, as a social support provider who positively affected her academic success.

Ms. Lizer saw promise in Uma's academic achievements and ensured her they would help her in any way they could. She shared ways she sought to support and encourage Uma:

Provided tutoring and praise to those [who] are always striving for more. [Uma] was the perfect student. She always wanted to learn more and she was motivated.

Uma found the support of the teacher to be another motivating factor and she took advantage of her teachers' assistance by spending time after school before work reviewing academic material.

I think the high expectations of my teachers helped too because they always sought to make us look into having a better future. I think what helped me were the tutoring sessions with my teachers who offered the sessions after school. They would help me with the questions I wasn't quite sure about from the topics covered in class. I often go see my last period teacher for help. Each time I go she helps me.

Uma's high school guidance counselor, Mr. Harris, also had a positive impact on her academic achievement. Although Uma was successful academically, she did not understand the process of applying to colleges and did not understand which academic institution would best suit her needs. Her guidance counselor continuously exposed her to potential universities that would have the resources Uma needed to succeed, and she appreciated the time and effort her guidance counselor gave to support her through the application process.

I listen to my counselor and my coach that are always helping. They always gave us tips for which universities best suited our level of learning.

Being encouraged by her teachers and guidance counselor was an external protective factor in Uma's life that contributed to her resilience. She realized the opportunity to attend college was within reach, and it was due to having relationships with knowledgeable individuals at her school.

I think that in general all my teachers of secondary school had a great impact on my learning. They never said “no” whenever I asked them for help, and when they noticed that I did not understand something they explained it again. I think that was one of the things that helped me the most; my relationship with my teachers and counselor.

Community involvement. While at Hamilton, Uma became involved with a social service organization so that she could contribute and give back to the community.

My mother would always tell us to do something without wanting something in return. To do something from the goodness of your heart and not for the purpose of getting something in return.

Uma decided to join an organization that focused on providing services for community members on a weekly basis, specifically for the homeless, young children and senior citizens in need. Personally aware of how difficult it can be to remain positive and motivated when you feel alone and helpless, Uma believed many minority students lost interest in school because they did not have a mentor encouraging them to persevere through adversity.

There was a community service program that helped me open my mind more with regard to the needy people in our city. Also, I noticed the person who is in charge of the program and how she continued to help them even though it was very difficult to do so. They really contributed, especially when I noticed how these people really suffered. This encourages me to continue studying hard so I can help others more.

Uma said volunteering with a community service program allowed her to transform the skills she developed as the result of supporting her family since childhood to an ability to assist the less fortunate. Through this social service experience, Uma learned experientially while actively engaging in purposeful, real-world activities.

My experiences in my community, school, home and high school have prepared me because in my home I learned responsibility. In my community I learned to help people. In my secondary school I have learned to value education and the difficulties that I sometimes experience I need to face in order to achieve what we want.

She cared about her community work and formed connections that are difficult to achieve in the classroom. By participating in the community service program and reflecting on their work, the experience became powerfully authentic to her. When this happens, all forms of learning are attainable.

Peer support. Uma developed friendships with students who shared similar life experiences. These students also arrived in the US without speaking the language, experienced economic struggles, and were separated from family. She viewed developing relationships with those who spoke the same language and shared a similar ethnicity as helpful in providing a sense of relief, comfort and instant connection; these relationships helped her adapt to her new environment and learn about school culture and dynamics.

My experiences at school have influenced my thoughts because my friend [also] moved to this country to attend school. This, for me, has led me to think positively about my education because we have learned to communicate with each other and have a good friendship.

Furthermore, Uma surrounded herself with individuals who were academically successful, principally due to the fact that they recognized the importance and significance of the opportunity to receive an education. This provided Uma with insights into how to improve her academic skills, become a better student and learn the ins and outs of high school.

A friend of mine named Emily. She goes to school with me. Whenever I have homework, I ask her for help and she always helps me with it.

When Uma realized that Emily's experience was similar to her own, she understood why they developed a close bond. Uma confided that being alone in this country took a toll; she very often she missed her family and tried her best to overcome that loneliness by thinking about her friend's positive life experiences . As her social support provider, Lawrence, stated:

Give advice, asks them questions, ask about their feelings, talk about their doubts, and never leave them alone. You must always talk to them about school.

Summary of Uma's Academic Resilience

Uma's academic resilience was fostered by various protective factors. Her academic successes were a reflection of the importance of her individual, familial and environmental dynamics. An analysis of the three protective factors that were present indicates Uma's experiences growing up in Mexico, taking on a parental role, and her experiences at Hamilton High School afforded her the opportunities to develop a self-directed work ethic inside and outside of the classroom. Uma's close relationship with the women in her family impacted the decisions she made during her academic career.

Overall, the most significant factor was Uma's familial factor. Uma's ability to live independent of her family unit contributed to her determination to advance her life, as well as the lives of her family, as she pursues higher education opportunities.

Case 3: Nadia

Yes. And so, more than anything, I want to study, for my dad and my mom.

Because I want them to always be proud of me.

Nadia was born in Michoacán, Mexico, 18 years ago and was welcomed by her older brother and parents. Her father and mother did not complete school and spent the majority of their time working many hours to provide for their family's basic needs.

Three years ago, when Nadia was 15, her parents made plans to enter the U.S. by crossing the border through the desert. They dreamed moving to America would lead to better economic opportunities, and they hoped exposing their daughter to an American education would provide her with the opportunity to learn a new language, excel academically, and one day become a successful professional. Nadia's brother stayed in Mexico in order to complete his education to become a Mechanical Engineer.

The family plan called for Nadia and her mother to cross the border first, travel to Chicago, and await her father as he made the trek across the desert alone. With tears in her eyes, Nadia shared that her family reunion never occurred because her father was lost in the desert. His body was later discovered by American federal officials.

The death of her father left Nadia heartbroken and saddled with the knowledge that he would not be present for many of the important milestones in her life. Nadia recalled the last conversation she had with her father; she said it was a premonition of what was to come.

My father told me I should study and take advantage of this opportunity. He said not to be like him who did not study and worked so hard to earn money. ‘An education will open the doors to a wonderful future,’ [he said]. I take those words to heart and when I am faced with challenges I remember my father; [I] take a deep breath, and look ahead.

Table 4

Participant Profile

Nadia	Profile
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death of father • Poverty • Parental educational attainment • ELL
Individual Protective Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly motivated
Ecological Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familial Factors. Mother-daughter relationship; father-daughter relationship; extended family • School Factors. Academic tutoring • School Factors. Guidance counselor • Community Service

Nadia’s Protective Processes**Individual factors.**

Highly motivated. Nadia reported that being an ELL student was a great academic challenge, so she requested additional help whenever it was possible. She turned to her ELL teacher for guidance and assistance in the various academic subjects she found the most challenging. Her ELL teacher, Ms. Norman, was a social support provider Nadia chose for this study. Ms. Norman described how she helped Nadia academically:

Never give up on a struggling student. Always remind an English learner of all the ways to practice outside of school (reading, library, English-speaking friends, time, etc.). Take the time to listen to students in such situations, encourage even the minutest of successes.

When Nadia was not confident about what was required of her, she independently sought answers.

Yes, I watch videos about things I know nothing about. I watch videos in English using my computer or using my cell phone and it really does help me with my homework. Whatever I don't understand, and when the teacher can't help...and I understand that they have other things to do in their lives, right? Well, then I use my computer and I investigate further I about it.

Nadia's commitment to learn the English language did not come easily to her, but she realized that the only way to master the language was to improve through continuous effort and practice. Ms. Norman reported the following:

Nadia changed her mind about her ability to learn English this year. Last year she didn't believe in herself as an English learner, or in the importance of language learning other than Spanish. She actually dove into the 'English pool' this year. Previously, she barely had her toes in the water.

Nadia took charge of her educational experience while in high school by expressing a greater interest in learning the English language.

It is very important for me to continue practicing. For example, if I can't pronounce something in English I will practice and practice until it comes out perfect. If I continue to practice then I know I will learn so much more!

For Nadia, high academic achievement and learning and practicing the culturally-significant language led to greater opportunities to develop her social skills and build self-confidence. Nadia also believed she had something to offer her peers who viewed each other as sources of information and knowledge.

Why? Why do I need to get good grades? I enjoy being around people who also want to get good grades and associate myself with them, so that I can learn from them and what they know. I, in turn, can teach them Spanish and the things I know. We can exchange what we know.

After spending time with peers and staff at her high school, she developed an interest in her science courses. Through this experience and exposure she set her career focus on medicine.

I am really interested in that. I have always enjoyed it and I want to study that.

I'm very interested in medicine.

Nadia found reckless the behavior of students who did not make efforts to take advantage of their educational opportunities, especially behavior that resulted in harming themselves or others. This motivated Nadia not to associate with people she thought were throwing away their opportunities.

So I think that those people are a waste, because they are young, speak very good English, there are some who do speak Spanish and why not go to school? Why do they prefer to be more on the street hanging out with bad company, using things that should not be used such as drugs and all that? That is not going to lead to anything good, my mom always talked about that. These people have a good future, you only have two choices: prison and death. It's sad, but true.

Nadia excelled academically. She demonstrated she was highly motivated and academically focused. Nadia was placed in AP Spanish and tutored others to excel, as well. Nadia valued learning; she found school to be appealing and made it a point to succeed.

Familial factors.

Mother-daughter relationship. Nadia's mother supported her daughter's educational ambitions, and, through her perseverance, she made it possible for her daughter to take advantage of the opportunities this country offered. Nadia, on the other hand, also was cognizant of the tremendous sacrifices her mother had made by crossing the border to move to this country.

My mother had me and my brother when she was very young. So, she could no longer finish school because she had to help her parents, my grandparents, because they had no money. That is why she didn't finish school. She went to high school for one or two more years and then they no longer wanted to send her. That is why she works, so I can study and have an education and profession. My mother wants me to finish high school because she did not finish.

Nadia reported that whenever her experiences at school were overwhelming and she wanted to give up, she turned to her mother for help.

So it's difficult. Then, we talk, I would come home and cry, because I was so discouraged, and my mom told me: 'No, you can!'

Since her father's death Nadia has developed a close bond with her mother, going as far as describing her mother as her "best friend."

My mother for me represents everything. She is my best friend. She is everything because she will always be there for me, and she encourages me with my education.

Through the difficult moments Nadia endured, she was still determined to succeed and not walk away from any challenge, knowing her mother would be there by her side.

Father-daughter relationship. Nadia spoke very affectionately about her father and stated how nurturing and supportive he was towards her educational goals. He was a positive influence in her upbringing, supporting her emotionally and financially as she made plans to pursue a college education.

I can tell you many things, for example, the beautiful advice my father gave before he died and the advice my mother gives now. Both of them always telling me not to give up and continue forward because I can achieve my goals.

Nadia realized her father regretted not completing his education while growing up in Mexico, and she feels an obligation to succeed as a way of thanking him for his love and guidance throughout her life. She also noted that her education was a priority for her father, and she feels compelled to live up to the high expectations he had for her.

One of the factors that motivated Nadia to succeed academically during high school was her commitment not to fail and not to disappoint her father. She expressed gratitude for her father's support, and said she felt determined not to let him down; he expected her to succeed.

So, more than anything, I want to study, for my dad and my mom. Because I want them to always be proud of me.

Her father had high expectations for Nadia, and he demonstrated his support by his continued words of advice.

This was the case with my father who would tell me with tears in eyes that it is very important to go to school. I can still remember his words and they will always be imbedded in my mind and I will never forget them.

With tears streaming down her face, Nadia shared that since kindergarten her father picked her up every year on the last day of school so that they could celebrate her academic achievements. Her father would not be physically present for her graduation, but she said she remained inspired by his words:

Live for you, do not live for others.

Extended family. In addition to parents, Nadia identified her grandparents as important to her academic success; she said they provided her with encouragement and praise. Nadia could barely contain her enthusiasm when she spoke of her grandparents' pride in her academic accomplishments. She added that her family was relying on her to finish school—not only for her own good, but so that she would be able to assist the family financially. Nadia was motivated by their reliance upon her to continue to pursue her academic goals.

My grandfather always tells me that we have to be someone in life. Since my grandparents never attended school, they tell it is wise to learn from the advice of the elderly because they have lived longer and know about life.

Nadia's cousin has also exerted a positive influence. She cited her cousin's ability to complete his educational goals despite facing many hardships along the way.

My cousin is a perfect example of someone who motivated himself to achieve something in his life. He is now my role model and I have learned you can achieve anything if you are determined to do so.

Nadia expressed appreciation for her cousin's example of being able to confront adversity, and she spoke of her desire to emulate the resilience he portrays as she continues her path towards a college career.

Environmental factors.

Academic tutoring. At Hamilton High School, tutors provide one-on-one and small group academic assistance in all subject matters. Taking advantage of this service, Nadia was able to improve study skills, organize notebooks, and manage the completion of homework and school assignments. Another one of Nadia's social support providers was her math teacher, Mrs. Nunez, to whom Nadia often went for tutoring. Mrs. Nunez said:

A genuine interest in one's students goes a long way. Other adults need to be supportive and positive during every interaction and model thinking and behaviors for all students. Once you show students that they can achieve, their confidence will begin to show.

In addition to assisting Nadia academically, Mrs. Nunez and Nadia's other tutors have become role models. They helped her change her expectations about higher education and the future. Nadia said the "college connection" aspect of tutoring fueled her desire and inspired her to set the goal to attend college.

Because alumnae from universities visit to help us and my teacher tutors me.

They stay and if you don't understand something they will review and repeat

anything afterschool with you. They will continue reviewing with you so you can learn and understand better.

Providing Nadia with the tools necessary to solve a math problem, translating a written assignment, or responding in the English language may seem like small gestures.

However, these gestures made an enormous difference, because they created change that affected how Nadia viewed herself as a student and as member of the Hamilton school community.

Yes, the majority of my classes are in English and I enjoy it. I really like it because I learn things and the teachers help me, honestly. If you do not understand they help a lot and they repeat everything. For example, this Friday I have an English exam and I don't understand some words so I stayed after school for tutoring so my teacher can help me. She tells me, 'If you don't understand, come to tutoring and I will review with you, review and review,' and I like that because they go over it so you learn.

Nadia indicated that Ms. Norman, her ELL teacher, often motivated her to do more. Ms. Norman said:

I have helped (Nadia) by constantly being encouraging even though I had at more than one point questioned her ability at being a successful student. We have also worked after school many times, and I have always been happy to help regarding issues in my class or otherwise.

Nadia accomplished her educational goals and developed interpersonal skills in order to build relationships with her teachers and college students, who were available to serve as role models. As her social support provider stated:

Nadia succeeded in school because she is unafraid to ask for help. She is motivated to do her best and works above and beyond to reach her potential. In return, Nadia became open to developing friendships with college tutors, learned about the American culture, explored possible career options, and gained satisfaction from developing her academic potential.

Summary of Nadia's Academic Resilience

Nadia's academic resilience developed as the result of the strong bond she shared with parents and with extended family. Nadia attributed much of her academic success to the strong school support system that surrounded her throughout her time at her neighborhood public high school. She was aware that only residing in this country for a short period of time was a deficit in her life; but she managed to move from awareness to action. As Mrs. Nunez stated,

I tried to remain positive and supportive of Nadia throughout her academic career at Hamilton. I believe she felt comfortable with me and trusted me to advise her and guide her towards graduation.

Nadia said she realized that the closer she got to graduating from high school and applying to college, the more she understood how important it was for her to be proactive and take control of her education.

Case 4: Yesenia

It just made me realize I had to try harder. I had to get better grades in order for the government to pay for my schooling. I kind of wanted it to hopefully be like that. (Interview, June 5, 2015)

Both of Yesenia's parents were born in Mexico, and neither of them completed high school. Yesenia described her initial high school experience as quite negative. She transferred to Hamilton High School after enduring bullying for two years at the selective enrollment high school in which she was originally enrolled. She declined to go into detail about her anguish, but she did disclose that the two students were arrested and expelled from the school.

Let's just say I had problems with these girls harassing me. It's just for some reason I couldn't—after everything that happened, after they got arrested and everything. It got to the point that I just didn't feel comfortable enough to be there. Everywhere I went, I just remembered this memory. Me, I don't like to remember things that, you know, bother me, caused me so much pain so. I was criticized for leaving. They were like, 'You did everything you had to do. You got them arrested and everything so why are you going to leave?' I just did it more to comfort myself. I used those, I guess you could say the rest of the months to put myself back together and get back on my feet.

Yesenia said the ability to let go of the memories of the bullying she endured for two years allowed her to enroll in Hamilton. While there, she maintained her academic success and further developed the ability to cope with the adversity she had faced at an early age.

Table 5

Participant Profile

Yesenia	Profile
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental educational attainment • Financial stress • Bullying experience at school
Individual Protective Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of responsibility to family and oneself
Ecological Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familial factors. Not wanting to be like her parents • School factors. Peers; extracurricular activities • Community Center • Community Dancing/Sports

Yesenia's Protective Processes**Individual factors.**

Sense of responsibility to family and oneself. Yesenia had to take responsibility for her education at a very young age due to her parents' lack of education. She said her situation at home led to the development of a strong independent nature. She began to realize early on that she had to work hard in order to move ahead and that she had to do whatever was necessary to succeed.

Let's just put it like this. When I was growing up, my parents really had no idea what they were doing with me. They had me and they had no idea what to do with me. So, I kind of grew up on my own the first ten years of schooling. So, I basically was on my own because my mom didn't really finish school. My mom doesn't speak English that well. I was learning English so she really couldn't help me school wise. So, those first ten years, I struggled a lot because I was trying to make sure I listened because I just knew that there was no way I would get help afterwards. I tried so much to pay attention to detail.

Yesenia's parents expected her to be academically successful. They monitored her grades and academic events by questioning her at home.

No, honestly, they don't care what I learn as long as they see it show when I show them my report card or something. They just take it as, 'Oh, she's doing good. She's okay.'

Having her academic work monitored by her parents became a strong motivator for Yesenia, bolstering her determination to finish high school and attend college. Yesenia hoped college would lead to her being able to move away from home. When asked whether her parents had certain expectations she replied:

Yes and no. Let's just say that it's really hard to distinguish what it is they want from me. I don't know if it's bipolar honestly but we'll just put it, one day they'll tell me to stay in school and make sure I study hard to achieve a lot in life but then the next second, the next day when they're stressing about money or stuff - because the only person that works is my dad so all the money comes from him and he really doesn't make much - they start telling me, 'You should really quit school, and get a job, and start helping pay the bills around here.' Even though I do already.

Yesenia also works about 40 hours a week. She's a hostess in a restaurant where her father also is employed. Having a job has afforded her lessons in responsibility—she pays part of the family's rent; pays for food, her clothing, and expenses related to her studies. She also steps in and acts as a parent for her younger brother, setting rules to complete homework, curfew, and determining which of his friends are counterproductive to her brother's academic pursuits and progress. Although Yesenia functions independent of her

parents, she still realizes that she's a part of the family, which is so important to student success. By adapting to her various roles as a student, sister, surrogate parent, and part-time breadwinner, Yesenia has had to become a self-directed learner.

So, it's Saturday morning. I wake up early. I shower. I start cleaning because that's normally what I do on a Saturday and Sunday because my mom cleans during the week because I'm always busy with school and work. It's always my constant schedule, honestly. So the weekend is where she takes a break and I handle all the house duties like cleaning and cooking. So, that's what I normally do on weekends except on Saturdays where I have soccer or sometimes my brother asks me to drive him to soccer practice or soccer game and I do that. That's when I would ask my mom, 'Do you mind cooking today or do you want me to take out food?' I try to kind of double team with my mom since she's the only person that really cleans or cooks in the house besides me.

The added responsibility is an additional stressor for Yesenia.

I mean at times, it's just, it makes me mad. Sometimes I just can't handle it. Sometimes I wish I could slam the door in [my father's] face, honestly. There's days where I'd really like to do that. But, you know, with the respect and stuff that I have for them I don't do anything. I don't go far. As much as if they will go far, I don't. I hold back and I just walk away.

Yesenia added:

Well, one, I pay for half the bills in my house. I pay for my phone. I pay half the rent and rent's about \$900 something. I pay like \$400 something out of my own pockets, then the other half my dad handles. Anything related to my brother, I pay

for, school stuff. If he wants to go out with his friends or something, he asks me. He doesn't ask my parents, he asks me. I sometimes feel like I have my own kid when I have to deal with him, too.

The financial responsibility at home has impacted her chances to attend a four year college. However, she has established a plan to circumvent that dilemma in hopes of transferring to a respected college.

Well, they told me--they all kind of got me into the idea that debt was going to be the worst thing that was going to eat me alive as I got older. In a way, I think I saw it happening. That's why I thought about it and thought with all the money situations we have at home, it's just better if I go to Community College, finish my two years off. I get what, 3,000 a year, 4,000 a year. So, my FAFSA pretty much covers that. Then from there when I transfer, hopefully, with even better grades and hopefully even better scholarships, I'm hoping to eventually get a full ride so that way I can just-- I mean if not, obviously, loans and stuff will have to be handled and stuff.

Yesenia was accustomed to being on her own and not asking for help from her parents. She believes all of the financial responsibility she already has carried has provided her with the ability to manage her life the best she knows how. Her autonomous nature and self-sufficiency are two of the significant contributing factors to Yesenia's academic success. She also said she developed problem-solving skills at a very young age that allowed her to become academically successful. Asked why she got good grades, Yesenia questioned herself, as well:

Well, quite honestly, I kind of question that to myself as of when I started thinking about it. Because, in all honesty, I don't consider myself smart. I just think I just know what I'm doing. Let's just say I can handle anything at any point because I've been through a lot my last couple years of schooling. It's not really me being smart. I listen to detail and that's where I just learn.

Her added family responsibilities at such a young age proved to be motivating factors to prepare her for her next academic journey to get in college.

Well, besides education being a good thing, I just feel like education is just necessary in general because without it you wouldn't know what the first amendment is or what the preamble of the constitution is, or just in general human rights. A lot of people don't really know what their rights are, in all honesty. I believe that because I've seen it. I've seen my cousins get arrested and they didn't know what their rights were. I'm like, 'You guys have the right to a lawyer and certain things.' Then, I remember one time my cousin got arrested. He called me to go get him and then when I went over there and I asked the guy, 'Did you give him a lawyer?' He's like, 'How do you know about rights?' I'm like, 'Just because I'm young doesn't mean I don't know my rights.' It's true - a lot of people don't know their rights. Then I even asked my cousin, 'He did read you the, what's it called - the Miranda rights?' At first he asked me what's that. I'm like, 'Do you have the right to remain silent.' He's like, Oh yeah, he did.'

Familial factors.

Not wanting to be like her parents. Yesenia believes that her parents' lack of English language fluency led to their not being able to help her with schoolwork and, as a consequence, that played a major role in her desire and ability to persevere in school.

Well, since they both didn't finish high school, they both kind of got me to get the idea that if you don't finish school, you're going to end up on the street. I don't want to be like that.

Yesenia views her parents' lives as the polar opposite of what she wants for her own future. Although at times her parents give her advice about her education, whenever there are financial constraints, the family's financial needs trumped Yesenia's academic goals.

Well, they tell me to take advantage of it. They give me good advice when it comes down to it. But then there's just like, there's days where I don't really get it [laughter]. Because, like I said, there's just days where they look at me like, 'Why don't you just quit school and go to work. Focus on working so you can help pay the bills.' It adds to the stress.

However, whenever Yesenia was pressured to give up school it motivated her to continue her education.

Their negativity motivated me to try hard in school, believe it or not, even though it's kind of a really bad way to motivate your child. But it helps in certain aspects but then in certain aspects I just feel like they take it just a little overboard.

Yesenia's self-reliance has been an important factor behind her pursuit of a college degree, and she refused to be deterred by her parents' changing needs or demands.

Environmental factors.

Peers. When Yesenia was in selective public high school, she was influenced by her peers in a positive way. Yesenia credits the positive influence of a close friend she developed during her freshman year at the previous school with being a major source of support. .

She knows. She's more of the kind of person that I can see notices details, a little better than I did. She points out my flaws but then she tells me how to better myself with those flaws. Then also, she helped me a lot at school sometimes. When I really needed to study and stuff, she'd motivate me. Sometimes we'd be on the phone all night or on Face Time, just kind of her tutoring me and then I'd be there listening to her. So, yeah.

When Yesenia left that school, however, she spent more time in her neighborhood. She lived across the street from Hamilton and was often a witness to gang activity and shootings. Her neighborhood friends consisted of high school drop-outs. But she used these relationships as another source of motivation.

One, they all tell me-- most of them have eventually said, I regret dropping out. I regret starting to smoke. I regret starting to drink because this all just influenced me to do bad things. They're not bad guys, they just didn't have any good direction.

Yeah, there's little centers around here I've only been (to one) once and that was because the guys from the hood all go over there, most of the dropouts. They all go over there. They introduced me to them. Then they (said things) like, 'Oh, you're not like them. Why do you hang out with them?' I was like, 'It's just

the fact that they motivate me. They make me feel good about myself in a way.'

That's the only place I'll probably ever go to honestly.

At the other high school, Yesenia also was enrolled in advanced placement classes. She had classes with the same group of students, which helped Yesenia develop organization, study, and social skills.

At school, sometimes me and my friends would be like, 'Let's exchange notes.

Let's see what we got each other.' Then if we missed a couple of things, we kind of scratch it down and stuff. It kind of helped.

She believed her previous high school offered more academic challenges and the faculty had higher expectations for student achievement. Despite not being at the other school, those high expectations stayed with her and led Yesenia to make the decision to pursue law when she transfers to a four year university.

I'm really interested in law. I'm thinking about attending Western Illinois University and University of Chicago for [law] school.

At the same time, Yesenia disliked having too much down time at Hamilton. Rather than getting support from within the school, she had to develop her own resources for motivation.

Well, a lot of the dropouts in this neighborhood have honestly pushed me to stay in school. They told me they regret and a lot of them have told me that they're thinking about going back. I say, 'Go for it. Go back, get your GED, and go to college. At least with an Associate's degree, you could at least get a better job than what you're working at.'

Even in high school, Yesenia had and maintained a deep sense of what she did not want her life to be like in the future.

I would probably say one of the biggest influences on me was one of my co-workers. He's 25. He dropped out of high school his freshman year. He didn't go back to school. He got some girl pregnant. He went through a lot but now he's working. He went back to school. He finally got his GED. It made me realize that you can set your mind to anything that you want to do. The thing is that you have to really--if you want it, you have to achieve it. You have to work hard for it because if you don't, you're not going to get far.

Yesenia's ability to maintain a vision of a positive future and learn from what she saw as negative examples in her environment resulted in successful personal and academic achievements that were crucial factors in the development of her educational resilience.

Extracurricular activities. Yesenia invested her time and kept herself busy by engaging in activities she was passionate about. In her case, two of the most influential activities were dance and soccer.

I've been dancing since I was four. That was probably one of the things that kind of helped me out as a kid also. Dancing kind of helped distract me, express myself with my emotions whenever I just wanted to explode. When I wanted to explode, I just listened to really hard intense music. It's just my way of expressing. I also play soccer a lot too. I played soccer since I was a kid also.

Well, with the whole dancing thing, dancing just kind of helped me stay fit. Dancing, soccer, both helped me stay fit. With you being more fit, obviously,

your mind's more awake. You're more awake to the world and you handle things better. It was also a stress reliever also, a stress reliever when I wanted it.

Yesenia said she found sports and art programs as a source of motivation, peer support, mentoring, and opportunities to help cope with stress. She explained that she also donated time to a community service organization primarily focused on helping community members of the neighborhood park.

The (community service organization) really did help me see that there's a lot of crazy people in the world — good and bad. Sometimes you have to give a little to get a lot more in return. It made me realize that what I had really isn't that bad. It's like as much as it sometimes kills me to say that, I sometimes hate dealing with all the things that I do, it's better than half the people in the city. Half the people don't have homes. Half the people don't even have parents to begin with. It just makes me see that I am very lucky to have what I have at this moment.

Strong relationships with teachers. Yesenia relied on her teachers and guidance counselors as her primary source for academic and personal stability. During turbulent family experiences, she confided in her teachers and depended upon them to provide guidance, focus, and emotional support.

Well, Mr. Smith was one of those really big important factors. He, over the years, has helped me kind of cope with never—like when I was feeling down, when I was feeling... When I was all over the place my sophomore year, honestly, I had a lot of family deaths so I was kind of going through a lot those past two years and he helped me. I didn't want to be in school. I was depressed. I didn't want to do anything. But he helped me. He knew I didn't like to be home so he would stay

[after school]. He would ask me, ‘Do you want to stay and do homework today?’ If I said yes, he’d stay there to do homework so that way I could finish my homework there and then I’d go home.

When Yesenia was asked who was a source of help at school she added:

Oh, my counselor. My counselor from the selective enrollment school was a big help to me and also the one that I have here at school. I got very close with since I’m with him for two periods a day. He has this personality that makes you see. He’s funny. He can be a child sometimes. He has the personality that you can laugh about it- but, then when he’s serious, he’s really serious. It’s like when you’re under the most amount of stress, he can kind of lighten up the mood for you and then he can just kind of get you to calm down and realize that yeah, this happened but you have to learn from it and just move on.

Yesenia said all of these people helped her keep her aspirations in focus, and they prevented her from becoming discouraged or perceiving her life as a failure.

Teachers and guidance counselors also worked to gain a more complete understanding of the issues motivating Yesenia’s actions. Their collaborative efforts were critical to her academic achievement.

Summary of Yesenia’s Academic Resilience

Yesenia’s academic success was profoundly influenced by the presence of two, protective factors. Yesenia relied heavily on her individual and familial factors to circumvent the adversity she faced throughout her academic career. Her ability to persevere was forged in the wake of negative academic support from her parents and the stressful financial responsibility imposed upon her. She looked at the struggles of her

parents' lives and was determined to change the course of her own life. This, in turn, assisted Yesenia to become independent, self-sufficient, and proactive in her goal to attend college.

Summary

Chapter IV examined the personal experiences and findings determined from the transcripts and analysis of data obtained during interviews with four, Latina, college-ready students. Social support providers, who contributed significantly to the academic success of the students, also were interviewed.

The usage of purposeful interview questions, recorded interviews and field notes produced insightful information and descriptive experiences from all participants. The data overwhelmingly indicated that all four participants demonstrated internal and external protective factors that contributed to the ecological processes that nurtured resilience within these Latinas as they persisted through a variety of emotional, personal and educational struggles.

The researcher concluded that the ability to make use of internal protective factors was an important characteristic common among the participants. Furthermore, there were four attributes that collectively aligned to forge the participants' internal resources and contributed to their ability to leverage the ecological factors that foster resilience: (1) aspirations, (2) responsibility, (3) motivation, and (4) perseverance. Their views provided credible responses to the two researcher questions. Overall, all of the participants were affected by their dispositional, familial and environmental factors.

The discussion in Chapter V explains and illustrates relationships between participants' comments, the literature and the emergent themes.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Focusing on Strengths

Hamilton High School counselors, teachers and administrators helped identify the participants for this study, all of whom were first-generation, college-bound seniors. These students—Marianna, Uma, Nadia and Yesenia—all faced numerous obstacles in both their school and home environments. Two began their high school studies in Mexico and then transferred to Hamilton. Proficient in Spanish, but with limited English-speaking skills, these students all fell within the lower SES bracket and were considered poor. Poverty implies a lack of food, inadequate housing, inability to pay bills, and a lack of health care that directly affects health, cognitive, and social development (Huston & Betley, 2010). The other two participants were born in Chicago, and had to overcome family-related and financial obstacles.

All of the students experienced some form of physical violence or emotional isolation—Marianna engaged in self-injurious behavior as a way to cope with unexpressed emotions; Uma left behind a mother and sister struggling with medically-diagnosed depression and moved alone to the United States to pursue better educational opportunities; Nadia's father died while attempting to get to the United States to ensure better educational opportunities for his daughter; and Yesenia was a victim of bullying while attending a selective enrollment Chicago Public High School. Yet, as the data

demonstrates, these young women were undaunted by internal or external obstacles in their pursuit of higher education.

Each participant detailed her personal experience and course of action. There are some commonalities among them. In addition, data gathered for this study are in alignment with literature of previous studies of successful Latina students. The influence of family support, intrinsic motivation, and the importance for students of establishing meaningful, caring relationships with teachers and counselors are cited in literature that identifies support systems as a factor in academic success for Latino students (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, & Bámaca, 2006; Fry & Gonzales, 2008; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Leonard, 2009), and in particular, Latinas.

It is the researcher's hope and intention that the data collected and presented will be utilized by educators, policy makers, and the Latino community so that Latina students will be afforded the support network, resources and educational opportunities necessary for academic success. It is also believed that this study can help instill in families, teachers, administrators, and policy makers the belief Latina students are capable of high levels of academic achievement.

Identifying Keys to Resilience

Utilizing the lens of data and analysis of the ecological factors that fostered resilience and influenced the academic success of four college-bound Latina students attending a neighborhood Chicago Public High School, this study potentially helps educators become better equipped to develop support systems and programs that are effective, efficient, and appropriate to student needs (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). To demonstrate and meet these criteria, three primary sources of data were utilized: (1)

individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews; (2) individual social support provider questionnaire; and (3) field notes.

For the initial analysis, the researcher utilized Bronfenbrenner Ecological framework to consider those systems that fostered resilience among participants in the study. A second round of analysis followed, using open coding methods. With general themes from the literature in mind, this method of analysis was intended to further explore the components of the participants' experiences that proved most influential to their efforts to attend college after high school graduation.

The identification of the ecological factors that fostered academic resilience in this study has implications for secondary school leaders as they develop pathways to increase the successful academic achievements of Latina students. Furthermore, the exploration of the key elements that influenced or motivated these students to pursue a college degree, allowed this research to not only pinpoint what families, schools, and communities can do to encourage Latinas to enter college, but also outlines what others facing the same adversity can learn from the experiences of these Latina students.

The following sections offer in-depth analysis of the relationships between Ecological Systems Theory and academic resilience among Latina high school students, explain the implications for research, policy and practice, and offer direction for future research.

Lessons of the Research

- (1) How have ecological factors influenced the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?

- (2) What do social support providers believe is critical for the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?

For the Latinas in this study, their academic path to reach college was filled with hardships. Data from this study indicate that these young women experienced the negative effects of poverty, language barriers, violence, and mental health issues. For these reasons, many of them still struggled with personal issues and lack of confidence in their linguistic abilities. Despite extreme adversity, however, they were able to will themselves to be academically successful because of internal and external protective factors.

There are internal and external protective factors that function collectively to foster resilience. The internal factors include: 1) aspirations, (2) responsibility, (3) motivation, and (4) perseverance. The external factors include: (1) caring personnel, (2) high parental expectations, (3) high expectations from professionals, and (4) strong peer and community support. According to Rutter (2012), the more protective factors available, the greater the likelihood that the student will be able to persevere through life's stressors.

Research Question 1. How have ecological factors influenced the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?

The trajectory to college was not easy for these Latina students; however, there were ecological factors that the participants identified as influencing their resilience. The data collected for this study overwhelmingly indicated that all four participants demonstrated internal and external protective factors as they persevered through a variety of emotional, personal, and educational challenges. These attributes, which were directly

connected to caring relationships with family members, teachers and peers, proved critical to the academic resilience of all participants in this study. Those relationships, in many cases, were the result of the social support network that provided love and attention through encouragement, support and high expectations.

Table 6

Research Question 1: Themes and Responses

Themes	Participants			
	Maria	Uma	Nadia	Yesenia
Self				
Perseverance	X	X	X	X
Aspirations	X	X	X	X
Responsibility	X	X	X	X
Motivation	X	X	X	X
Family				
Desire to be better than parents	X	X	X	X
Parents' Encouragement and advice	X	X	X	
Extended Family Encouragement	X	X	X	X
School				
Extracurricular Activities	X	X	X	X
Strong relationship with teachers	X	X	X	X
Strong bond with Guidance counselors	X	X	X	
Peers	X	X	X	X
Community				
Desire to move out of community	X			X
Give back to community	X	X	X	X

Based on the findings, the research concluded that internal protective factors were an important individual characteristic necessary for the participants' advancement. Furthermore, there were four attributes collectively aligned that forged the participants' internal protective actors: (1) aspirations (2) responsibility, (3) motivation, (4) and, perseverance.

A significant factor found among the interviewees during data analysis was the notion of motivation. Coded within the individual characteristic of internal protective factors, all participants demonstrated strong motivation to overcome environmental impediments and adversity. Adversity came in the form of social, emotional, financial and environmental challenges for these Latina students, two of whom were non-English speakers when they began attending Hamilton High School

Uma and Nadia arrived in the U.S. two years ago from Mexico, while Marianna and Yesenia were the first generation in their respective families born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. However, all these young women faced similar obstacles based on financial issues, language barriers, and lack of familiarity with the U.S. educational system. Maurizi (2013) and colleagues reported Latino students from low-income families often do not feel a sense of belonging in their school or neighborhood. This lack of connectedness to school and neighborhood impacts their academic and psychological functioning (Dahl, Ceballo, & Huerta, 2010).

Motivation

At the individual level, Uma and Nadia described particular struggles as ELL students in school. One challenging experience they both cited was being a Spanish-speaking Latina in a high school dominated by English-speakers, even though the school had a majority Latino population. Echoed in the literature, the inability to collaborate with teachers and school staff can lead to a lack of school connectedness and disengagement (Kearney, 2008). While the participants struggled to adapt to the social and academic environment as non-English speaking students, they were able to prevail because of environmental support from teachers and counselors. Uma and Nadia shared

instances of being able to transform their struggles in to strengths. They also were able to develop their sense of self-worth by becoming proactive as ELLs in school. Attending tutoring sessions before and after school facilitated their process of learning English and resolving conflicts between their native language and culture, and the language and culture of school.

Motivation to learn has been linked not only to better academic performance, but to greater conceptual understanding, satisfaction with school, self-esteem, and social adjustment, and to lower dropout rates (Gottfried, 2009). The young women's ability to plan, problem-solve, and set goals for accomplishing tasks instilled in them a sense of purpose. By prevailing over difficult circumstances, they also improved their self-confidence and self-image as ELL Latinas. Uma and Nadia became actively involved in academic and non-academic organizations to improve their language skills and help other students develop their Spanish-language skills. The more confident Uma and Nadia became in their capacity to learn, the more engaged they became in their learning process.

This exchange of knowledge and skills resulted in their becoming actively engaged in the school culture and related activities. The relationships developed in the school, between teachers and students, offered opportunities for students to prepare for academic success. Not surprisingly, a sense of belonging has been positively associated with preventing students from dropping out of high school as emphasized in literature by Bonnie Benard (1991). The participants' sense of belonging in school further supported their motivation to succeed academically in the face of adversity.

All four of the young women were the first generation of their families to pursue a college education. Their lack of knowledge about the college application process was cited to be challenging since they could not rely on family members for assistance. In Gandara and Contreras's (2009) study of Latino parent involvement, parents report having high aspirations for their children; however, they often lack the cultural and social capital necessary to guide their children to fulfill those goals. Marianna, Uma, Nadia and Yesenia clearly cited their parents' inability to understand how to transition to higher education as an obstacle, but they were able to use school resources to access that information. These resources took the form of school professionals, peers, and college admissions counselors.

All of the participants were independent in nature and highly self-sufficient outside of the classroom. Three of the four participants worked full time jobs while attending school. They were responsible for paying for groceries and a portion of their family's rent. They also had responsibilities at home, including cooking, cleaning or assisting with childcare for younger siblings. They saw these added responsibilities at home as preparation for adulthood and the responsibilities associated with entering college, and they recognized through their struggles that in order to achieve their goals, they had to do well in school. Consequently, those goals became the primary factor behind their quest for academic success and fostered the resilience.

Aspirations

All of the participants developed academic and career aspirations during their time at Hamilton High School. They repeatedly cited education as the key to having a career and a career that would allow them to improve their lives. They agreed that the

length of time and the type of schooling people pursued determined their future professional prospects and potential earnings. Further, for these young women, the education, career, and salary determined the positive or negative outcome they could potentially create for their families.

Marianna, Uma, Nadia and Yesenia all were determined to improve their lives and not continue to struggle like their parents. They saw their future careers as the opportunity to help others with similar backgrounds, and they felt a personal responsibility to assist others in acquiring the tools to be successful.

Marianna acknowledged that attending college would be a challenge. She also recognized that her desire to become a psychologist meant she would need to seek resources on her own and find the best path that would lead to her accomplishing her goals.

As a recent immigrant to this country, Uma found herself confronting many challenges, such as living in the U.S. without her parents on her and learning a new language. Yet, she found the wherewithal to continue her studies and set a career goal of becoming a high school teacher. Yesenia learned to persevere on her own by listening attentively in class, removing herself from a harmful school environment, and setting a goal to study law. Nadia continued communicating with family members in Mexico and listened to *consejos* (advice) to pursue the field of medicine.

These young women undoubtedly have grasped the worth of attaining a college education, and aspire to challenge whatever obstructions appear to deter them from their aspirations.

Responsibility

When teachers and other school staff members communicate their high expectations and beliefs in the student's ability to be successful, that student develops a third factor within the attribute of self-efficacy, and it includes a sense of responsibility as a protective factor. An underlying sense of responsibility was a pervasive theme during the interviews when the participants were asked to describe what made them pursue academic success. The data indicated that these participants persevered as an act of gratefulness for the struggles of their immediate and extended families. Their sense of responsibility was directly tied to their roles as older siblings, children of non-English speaking immigrants, and as first generation college-bound students.

Instead of being discouraged by poverty, violence, and danger, the participants attributed their environments as providing the motivation for taking responsibility to do whatever was needed to do to attain a better life. The idea of giving back to their families also was a strong motivator to succeed academically; in addition, they made note of the importance of taking advantage of opportunities that other family members did not have.

Marianna, Uma, Nadia and Yesenia felt significant responsibilities as future educated professionals for their families, school and community; to be role models for their siblings, and financial providers for their families. These responsibilities also fueled their focus on academic and career aspirations.

Resilience

For the purpose of this study, resilience is defined "as the internal factors and processes students need in order to overcome adversity or avoid succumbing to school failure, substance abuse, mental health problems, and juvenile delinquency" (Morales,

2008, p. 12). These students overcame a broad array of adversity—mental health issues; the death of a loved one, and bullying at school—and all showed themselves to be resilient students both personally and academically.

All of these events could have changed the trajectory of their lives and led to school failure. However, these young women demonstrated, through their lived experiences, being able to recover from traumatic life events, while not being discouraged from attaining their educational goals. Their ability to move forward after harmful adverse events in their lives embodies the resilience theories of Brooks (2006), Masten (2010), and Combrinck-Graham (2013).

Some of the young women were motivated and encouraged by parents, school professionals and peers, while others were motivated by the idea of improving the lives of their family and themselves. Whatever their personal reasons, these young Latina women saw value in both the experience and in the pursuit of their goals, and understood what they had to accomplish. Consequently, they were able to use academic resilience to continue their path to achieve success by being admitted to college.

Factors such as schools that provide safe and caring environments, supportive school professionals and peers, and high academic expectations for success are external, ecological factors that can be integrated into the culture of schools. While these factors are positive attributes that will improve the culture of schools for all students, the findings in this study suggest that additional supports are needed to maximize the development of resilience for urban, college-bound, Latina students. Based on the findings, the research determined that external protective factors were equally as important as the participants' internal protective factors.

Furthermore, the research concludes that caring relationships developed by student participants were vital in their development of academic resilience, including: (1) familismo; (2) consejos (advice); (3) social support providers.

Familismo

Family is considered to be one of the most important values in Latino culture: familismo. The term familismo refers to Latino attachment to their core values and traditions with their nuclear and extended families (Smith-Morris, Morales-Campos, Alvarez, & Turner, 2013).

Familismo emphasizes prioritizing the family over the individual, showing respect for elders, and honoring the family name (Schwartz, 2007). To this end, parents and extended family not only contribute to motivation regarding schooling, but also provide strong guidance to continue one's education (Leonard, 2009).

The most obvious result from this study was the recognition of the connection between family and the success of the participants. Familial protective factors encompassed one distinct component that seemed to have a strong impact on academic achievement. Particularly significant for the participants, however, was their parents' example of perseverance, their parents' involvement, and their own high educational expectations. The participants of this study witnessed their parents' perseverance resulting from their personal immigration experience, employment as laborers, and income status.

An interesting finding, however, was that even though their parents provided specific examples of the hardships arising from their immigrant experience, there was an acknowledgement they had endured numerous struggles and sacrifices after coming to a

new country to provide a better life and opportunities for their children. All the participants acknowledged these sacrifices and found them to be a source of inspiration and motivation to continue the journey their parents had begun. In fact, the family struggles served as a motivating factor for these young women to continue their educational journey and create better lives for themselves.

Consejos

Despite having low levels of education, the parents of the participants had high educational aspirations and expectations for their daughters. This proved to be highly effective in combating the low expectations the students said they experienced in this Chicago public school they deemed to be low-performing, under-resourced, and highly segregated.

Although the participants shared that their parents were less involved in their academic experiences, the parents offered their support through other means (i.e., listening, being present, asking questions, and monitoring their grades). As seen in the previous research (Stanton-Salazar, 2001), immigrant parents of successful students articulated high aspirations for their children, in spite of not having had the opportunity themselves to attend school in their own country, nor being able to help their children complete schoolwork, or navigate the educational system. More specifically, the parents always made an effort to remind these young women that through academic achievement they could potentially avoid the hardships the parents had experienced as laborers.

In addition, all participants received love, support, and care from both their parents and extended family. The parents used *consejos* (verbal storytelling) as they encouraged their children to focus on doing well in school. They used as examples the

experiences of their own lives to impress upon their children the importance of staying in school to acquire a quality education. Education was looked upon as the solution to attaining future success. All the participants reported that these *consejos* were consistent throughout their lives and that they had a strong impact on their decision to attend college.

The findings in this study also described how extended family both directly and indirectly (i.e., siblings, cousins, grandparents) contributed to their academic success. Specifically, these extended family members provided encouragement and academic support (i.e., financial assistance, motivating words, and personal life lessons). As discussed in the literature, the most commonly cited message promoting resilience is the caregiver's belief in a child's capacities (Niemeyer et al., 2009). Such positive expectations are often strengthened by other family characteristics, such as structure, reasonable and defined expectations, discipline, guidance, and encouragement (Niemeyer et al., 2009). As current studies have indicated, cultural bonds help students cope with social or environmental difficulties, such as low socioeconomic status, employment, dangerous neighborhoods, violence, loss of work, and discrimination (Deng et al., 2006).

Both Uma and Nadia faced difficulty studying in the U.S., and often found comfort communicating with their grandparents in Mexico. The advice, or *consejos*, they received was looked upon as a blessing, and their grandparents' *cuentos* (stories) embodied life lessons. More specifically, as the data suggested, extended family members tended to serve a protective role by reflecting on their negative experiences and how they were able to deal with adversity. This concurs with research that point out that for Mexican American students, *la familia* (the family) is one of the most critical factors

contributing to their academic success (Alfaro et al., 2006; Garnezy, 1982; Gordon & Song, 1994; Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003).

The Benefit of Social Support Providers

The high school experience, in particular, is exceptional in that it bridges adolescence and young adulthood, and includes many events which offer transitions in a student's life. Ecological Systems Theory creates pathways for the student to ensure positive shifts in a student's experience. Marianna, Uma, Nadia and Yesenia each named at least one social support provider who impacted the outcome of their educational journey. These social supporters varied in terms of race, age, and educational level. What they had in common was the ability to recognize the potential of each participant and offer support within their means.

Table 7

Social Support Providers Named by Participants

Participant	Social Support Provider					
	Teacher	Parent	Sibling	Guidance Counselor	Neighbor	Peers
Marianna	X	X	X	X		X
Uma	X	X		X	X	X
Nadia	X	X	X	X		X
Yesenia	X			X		X

Marianna found it difficult to cope with the loss of a loved one, and turned to self-injuring behavior as a short-term stress reliever. She admirably referenced her guidance counselor, whom she said positively impacted her high school career. The guidance

counselor found various supportive avenues for Marianna to utilize in order to face her emotional crisis and provided her with the support and encouragement to overcome them.

Literature has shown that although students enter high school with varying degrees of resilience related to individual and family characteristics, schools can and do play a role in fostering their academic achievement (Rivera & Waxman, 2007; Wang & Gordon, 2012). The findings of this research study suggest high school guidance counselors can play an even larger role in fostering a positive adjustment to high school, as well as provide intervention programs to develop and enhance protective factors for students.

Brighter futures, especially for Latina students, require that they have the support necessary for achieving high standards. School counselors have the ability to use their skills to develop advocacy action plans to guide students and create pathways to succeed academically. Additionally, Marianna was inspired to use her experience to reach out to other students at her high school who were facing an emotional crisis or psychological struggles. She began to actively engage in extracurricular activities at school, and openly used her experience as an example to help students who isolated themselves from the rest of the student body. Gorman-Smith and Tolan (2003) in a research study cited teaching and developing adolescents' social and emotional skills can also help to prevent problem behavior and promote academic success.

In Combrick-Graham's (2013) study of Chicago violence, more than 70% of the students interviewed stated they were victims of violence. Yesenia was the victim of bullying during her first two years at another high school. According to Graham-

Bermann (2011), children who are victims of violence are often distracted and, in turn, have difficulties staying focused and learning while in school.

However, the data of this study do not support the existing literature. Upon the arrest of the bullies, Yesenia chose to transfer to another high school and begin a new academic experience at her neighborhood school. The data of this study found several institutional protective factors influenced Yesenia's academic resilience. These included teachers, dance, peers, and sports, all of which proved to be influential factors fueling her academic trajectory.

The present study provides evidence that the most influential school characteristics for promoting resilience were the presence of caring and supportive school-based professionals and peers. Combrinck-Graham (2013) cited in their study, that school systems at the micro, exo, and meso levels can impact the development and maintenance of anti-social or pro-social behavior, and serve as a powerful source of social support and bonding. It is this type of environment that directly influences the investment in academics by Latina students.

Marianna, Uma, Nadia and Yesenia were each able to name at least one school-based professional who served as an important source of support. Forming meaningful personal relationships has the potential to improve student performance both behaviorally and academically.

Looking at Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), it becomes evident that the school alone cannot provide all of the factors necessary for forging a resilient student without the assistance of and cooperation between faculty, staff, family and the community. These specific methods included: (1) listening and addressing both

academic and non-academic concerns through support and encouragement; (2) challenging students to their potential; (3) guiding students' interests and needs; (4) tutoring students before and after school; (5) giving positive feedback; and (6) communicating high and realistic academic expectations. By developing trusting and positive relationships with school-based professionals; participants placed more effort in class and school, showed higher levels of engagement, and demonstrated higher motivation and positive attitudes towards learning. These findings suggest that school-based professionals can serve as a protective buffer to help Latina students overcome adversity.

Additional evidence from the social support providers participating in this research study support the strength-based perspective that indicates that positive relationships with helpful adults can make all the difference in fostering and helping students apply their strengths to the learning process so that they can achieve academic excellence. The presence of a caring teacher, school staff member, or individual in the community who knows a student well and expresses interest in her development is a powerful component in promoting personal and academic growth.

Table 8

Social Support Providers: Themes and Responses

Social Support Provider	Responses						
	Listen	Care	Model Expectation	Challenge Students	Tutoring	High Expectation	
A	X	X	X	X	X	X	
B	X	X	X	X	X	X	
C	X	X	X	X		X	
D	X	X		X		X	
E	X	X	X	X	X		
F	X	X			X		

Research Question 2. What do social support providers believe is critical for the academic resilience of college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school?

The six social support providers gave written responses to the second research question in this study. They presented the following responses for college-bound Latina students attending an urban public high school: (1) encourage and support students' academic efforts both at home and school; (2) show a genuine interest in what students say and do at home and school; (3) praise students who are always striving for more; (4) offer advice, provide suggestions, and communicate academic goals; (5) show and tell them that academic success is an outlet to setbacks in life; (6) model thinking and behaviors for all students.

There are parallels between the responses expressed by the student participants in this study and those described by social support providers. These findings support the

argument that ecological factors directly influence the academic achievement of college-bound Latina students attending an urban, public high school.

Peer Relationships

Additionally, the data demonstrated some ways in which peer relationships were relevant factors in the academic success of Marianna, Uma, Nadia and Yesenia. Kroventz and Arriaza's (2006) study references students whose peers' emphasize the value of education are more likely to be academically successful than their counterparts. These young women relied on the guidance and support of their peers to develop better study, organizational, and preparation skills. Positive peer relationships fostered through an emphasis on learning rather than competition provide children with support outside the family in an environment in which they can experiment, develop skills and values, and learn to share, help, and nurture one another.

Service-Learning Benefits

Service-learning also was an influential factor stimulating academic perseverance. The data revealed service learning programs provided the subjects with opportunities to serve students with common backgrounds and allowed participants to develop protective factors that link their own needs with those they served. For participants, service learning as an enlightening experience and it provided them with perspective about their own personal lives. This experience served to insulate their protective factors against any negative personal and academic experiences they encountered.

Student Protective Factors in Ecological Systems

The theoretical framework for this case study utilized Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). In this case study, Marianna, Uma, Nadia and

Yesenia are viewed as developing and interacting within the five systems, and they are shaped academically and personally by each of them. For example, Bronfenbrenner's microsystem was represented in this study as the positive relationships these young women engaged in with family members, school professionals, and the service learning community program.

The mesosystem consists of the interactions between the different parts of a person's microsystem, where a person's individual microsystems are not self-reliant, but are unified and assert influence upon one another. All of the student participants in this study had excellent relationships with school professionals, family, and extra-curricular activities, both in and out of school.

Latinas from disadvantaged communities characteristically face many more risk factors than youth from more advantaged backgrounds, often with fewer external resources to buffer them from these risks (Schlee et al., 2008). An example of the dynamics in the exosystem related to the study's participants showed how their parents were actively involved and had high academic expectations, regardless of their busy work load. All of the student participants were academically affected by the encouragement and motivation they received from their parents and extended families.

The macrosystem encompasses the cultural environment in which the person lives and all other systems that affect them, including economic, social, and political factors. These young women all stated that their parent's motivation, encouragement, and expectation that they would do well in school invigorated them to pursue their academic goals. Further, despite the economic or social deficits they faced, the desire to one day have a better future motivated them to excel academically.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) chronosystem specified that as children develop into adults they either choose to adapt or leave the environmental conditions they were exposed to, and the decisions they make while developing into adults will influence their future. In this study, all of the participants expressed clear academic goals for the future and by sharing those goals, they demonstrated resilient attributes. All of the students participating in this study progressed academically over time, as a result of the environmental systems they were actively drawn in.

Implications of the Study

According to Benson et al. (2012), schools can embody both the environmental conditions that foster resilient reactions to immediate circumstances, preventative academic and social issues, and curricula necessary for developing individual internal protective factors. In the culture of a school, positive academic and social supports are significant in the learning process. This study's findings suggest that creating dynamic methods to increase academic resilience in urban Latina high school students would be most likely be successful if blended with more than one of the ecological pathways. The following sections delve into some methods that can be applied in schools to promote academic resilience in urban, Latina college-bound students

The collaborative efforts of school and Latino families play a major role in the educational development of children. Their joint involvement should begin at a very young age, especially taking into consideration that the relationship between school and family directly impacts academic success. As the collaborative efforts between school and family are enhanced, so is the value of education in the child's life. The findings of this study indicate that the participants did receive support from their families and school

professionals. However, what was not explicitly stated was the exchange of information and interaction between these support providers.

Many Latino parents face challenges that hinder their full participation in their children's schooling often due to their lack of experience with and knowledge of the school system. Participation and strong parent-teacher relationships are further compromised when parents feel that the only time that they are contacted by the school is when their child is manifesting behavioral challenges or academic failure (NCES, 2009). In order for all Latinas to be academically resilient, collaboration between the home and school can only function when school professionals and parents hold high expectations, communicate, assist in improving academic progress, and hold the students academically responsible.

When these collaborative efforts are adopted, then and only then, we will see a rise in the academic resilience of Latina students. To forge collaborative efforts, guidance counselors can be instrumental in bridging the home and school network. This study demonstrated Latina students developed strong bonds with both guidance counselors and family members. Guidance counselors can take a step further by communicating with home providers with the necessary information to ensure academic success.

All these young women experienced personal and academic adversity both before and during school. As recent immigrants, Uma and Nadia were not well-informed of the school system in this country. They also had language barriers making it very difficult to assimilate the cultural expectations of their school environment. In addition, all of the participants were first generation, college-bound students who had little knowledge of the application process to access higher education.

All participants in the study reported their guidance counselor to be instrumental in their ability to be academically resilient. School counselors are well-positioned to lead efforts to help Latina students tackle the barriers that many face and support them by effectively addressing cultural differences and rifts between the school and Latino families (Fry & Gonzales., 2008). First, school counselors must ensure that school-wide efforts to eliminate the language barrier are implemented because parents who understand the school's expectations and school structure are better able to support their children (Lee, 2008). Counselors can also offer information regarding the home and community beliefs of Latina students to help teachers understand how these factors impact classroom learning. According to Waters and colleagues (2009), the likelihood of transmitting social and institutional support increases with an increase in the level of regular interaction between school agents and parents. This helps build relationships based on trust and support.

All student participants revealed their active involvement in service-learning. Literature supports the position that participation in service learning greatly increases self-efficacy, responsibility, and organization among high school students and provides them with the opportunity to develop positive protective factors.

The Case for Further Research

The purpose of qualitative research studies is to develop an understanding of themes as they are experienced in a particular setting (Yin, 2009). This study is a qualitative case study of academically-resilient, college-bound Latina students at a specific Chicago Public High School. However, the differences in the participants, setting, and data collection affect the potential to generalize the results of this study to

other settings. It is conceivable that the Latina students in this study do not represent the lived experiences of other Latina students, nor do they represent the umbrella groups within the United States of Latin American descent. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize the findings of this study to other schools that do not share similar demographics.

However, there is a need in research to examine the ecological factors that contribute to the academic achievement of Latina college-bound students. For instance, the findings of this study identified the internal and external protective factors that exist within the Latino family, community, and institutions that played a significant and essential role in the academic resilience of the four participants of this study. In this regard, the findings of this study support the idea that Latina students experiencing mental health, immigration, and poverty circumstances should no longer be viewed through a deficit lens, but instead, future studies should begin to examine the potential opportunities for these students that can exist within the challenges that many experience given supportive resources.

While the current findings suggest that protective factors within home, school, and community environment may be linked to achievement for Latina, college-bound students, they are limited. There is a need to further explore ecological factors that promote the resilience of Latina students faced with adversity.

Furthermore, interviewing the families of students for more information could enrich the study and possibly bring further insight stories told by the students. Moreover, there is a need to examine specific parenting practices that facilitate Latina high school students' experiences of academic resilience regardless of the adversity.

Wang and Gordon (2012) suggested the formation of partnerships that can harness the resources of family, school and community to create contexts that support student's learning successes by meeting the physical and social wellness needs of those students and their families. The findings of this study indicate the participants did receive support from their families and school professionals. However, what was not explicitly stated was the exchange of information and interaction between these support providers.

Another recommendation for future research would be to utilize a longitudinal study of Latina students. For instance, a longitudinal research design that follows college-bound, Latina high school graduates through their college experience would be informative, as well. Such a study would help provide a much more comprehensive model of development that considers the influence of all ecological systems over a specified period of time.

More research is also needed to explore the function of school counselors in urban high school settings. There is a need in research to determine their active role in fostering academic resilience among Latina students. Moreover, an additional research question would be to examine the specific external protective factors counselors can implement to help develop and nurture these students during their high school career.

Further research also is needed to understand the relationship between immigrant Latina high school student and guidance counselors. Moreover, a case study examining the academic resilience of immigrant Latino families will provide a deeper understanding of the formation of these protective factors. These studies can lead to the implementation of programs that can effectively improve the conditions of the communities and schools and better support the academic resilience of Latina students.

Overview: Insight and Understanding

The data collected during this study provides insights into and understanding of the adversities faced by Latina students as they strive for academic success in high school. Specifically, the research study investigated the ecological factors that positively foster and support Latina students' ability to become academically resilient. The ecological viewpoint takes into account the impact of multiple levels of environmental factors that influence individual behavior. Further, the ecological model allows the researcher to describe and interpret the experiences and achievements of urban Latina students from different perspectives.

Using a multiple-case study methodology provided the opportunity to study correlations and causal factors related to Latina academic resilience. The primary value of designing a multiple-case study is that it compares cases in their totality; in addition, one can study numerous elements within identifiable cases. The distinctive cases in this study share numerous ecological factors.

Qualitative research designs produce data required for a complete understanding of a problem and of populations under study. This qualitative study used in-depth individual interviews, social support provider statements, and field notes. The criterion sample was comprised of four, urban, college-bound Latina students and six, social support providers, who were considered important sources of encouragement.

The sample size for qualitative studies is usually much smaller than those presented in quantitative studies. Qualitative samples focuses on code instead of accumulating an excessive amount of data, which necessarily do not lead to more information. The frequency of data is not as important as the understanding of the process

behind an inquiry. Qualitative research is concerned with meaning and not making generalized statements. Patton (2002) provides reasons for this.

There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what the study is seeking to determine, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources. Many qualitative methodologists claim the profound analysis and exhaustive nature of qualitative work compared to other forms of research is daunting (Yin, 2009).

In actuality, the demands of a case study on intellect, ego, and emotions are far greater than those of any other research method. This is because the data collection procedures are not routinized. During data collection, only a more experienced investigator will be able to take advantage of unexpected opportunities rather than being trapped by them—and also will exercise sufficient care against potentially biased procedures.

In a qualitative study, gathering diverse opinions about a topic strengthens the findings of the study, but if the sample size is too large data will sound repetitive and insignificant. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), if the researcher is resolute to the idea of qualitative research, sample size should adhere to the concept of saturation—when the gathering of new data does not add further to the investigation of the topic being researched. As witnessed in this case study, many of the participants share common ecological and social factors that led to their academic resilience.

Although there are other factors that may affect sample size in qualitative studies, saturation is the guiding method to employ during data collection. Thus, adding more participants would not add further insight into the research study, making the sample size

appropriate for this study. For Brannen and Nilsen (2011), a small sample size in a case study may be sufficient if it is unique and can produce an array of significant data.

Jennifer Mason (2010) goes on to suggest that amount of case studies interviewed does not necessarily make the research more believable. The content of the interviews, the quality of the data they yield, skill and inventiveness in analyzing the information are the determining factors. Five hundred interviews that were all too superficial to yield much use would only yield incisive flashes of insight from a few.

For this research study, four participants interviewed brought forth intense and deep experiences as Latina students facing adverse conditions and rich detail into how their experiences led to academic resilience and success.

Conclusion

The study found that Latinas possess a significant array of strengths and personal resources, or protective factors, which are not often taken into consideration in their educational environment. These protective factors can impact their ability to complete high school and pursue a college education: aspiration, responsibility, motivation, and perseverance.

The Latina students profiled in this study had to overcome numerous obstacles—language, financial, family responsibility, neighborhood influences, etc. However, these young women were able to develop resilience due to their firm commitments to their families; the notion that they served as role models for others in similar situations; their desire to “give back” to their communities; their ability to use bilingualism to their benefit; their ability to resist micro-aggressions; their sense of purpose; an evolving, and circumstances-driven, intellectual consciousness, and a high-level of cognitive skills,

despite language barriers, which became advantageous for negotiating shifting power structures and cultural conditions.

It cannot be denied that some students need assistance to guide them through the American public school system. However, this study provides a window of both possibility and opportunity for educators working with Latinas and demonstrates how they can, even with limited resources, provide the support necessary to further foster determination and the drive to succeed for these young women.

Bolstered by research and empirical evidence, the study demonstrates that Latina students already possess many protective factors that can be acknowledged and further leveraged, in partnership with their families, community services and support of their educational institutions, to help develop academic resilience and succeed in their goals of attaining a college education.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 9, 2015

Rebecca Testa-Ryan
Loyola University Chicago
7734 W. Myrtle Chicago, IL 60631
Dear Ms. Testa-Ryan,

Thank you for your interest in conducting research in The Chicago Public Schools. The Research Review Board of the Office of Accountability has reviewed your proposal and has approved your request to conduct research. Although your study has been approved, school principals have final authority over activities that are allowed to take place in the school. If data collection continues beyond a year from this approval, please complete the Modification & Continuing Review Process Checklist.

Upon completion of the research study, a copy of the final report or summary of the results must be provided to the Research Review Board. The Board reserves the right to use the information in the research report or summary for planning, solicitation of grants, and staff development. Please note that your study has been assigned Project ID # 1001. If you have any questions, please contact Kylie Klein directly at 773-553-3483.

Sincerely,

Stacy Norris Chair,

Research Review Board

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

2014

Dear Patricia Valez:

My name is Rebecca Testa-Ryan and I am a doctoral student, under the supervision of Amy Heineke, PhD from the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. My dissertation study is designed to analyze ecological factors that contribute to the academic resilience among Latina students. I have received approval to complete this study with Loyola University and Chicago Public Schools. Through my research, I am seeking to answer the following questions: (1) How do ecological factors influence the academic resilience of college-bound, Latina students attending an urban public high school? (2) What do social support providers believe is critical for developing the academic resilience of college-bound, Latina students attending an urban public high school? Academically resilient college-bound, Latina students are being requested by this researcher to participate in this study. The interview is designed to gain insight into how ecological factors fostered their ability to be academically successful at your fine institution. I am asking for recommendations of 6 academically-resilient, college-bound, Latina students to be invited to participate in my study. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will not interfere with the instructional day of your students. I will call you within the next ten days for your recommendations, and then would like to place an invitation to participate in this study in their mailboxes. If you have any questions in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me at rtestaryan@yahoo.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Rebecca Testa-Ryan, Researcher

APPENDIX C

ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Project Title: ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF
LATINA STUDENTS

Researcher: Rebecca Testa Ryan

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Amy Heineke

Introduction: You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Rebecca Testa-Ryan for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Amy Heineke in the Department of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are Latino and are currently attending urban public high school. 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 examine how your environment influences the academic success of Latina students. Academically successful college-bound Latina students are being requested by this researcher to participate in this study. The interview is designed to understand how family, school, community, society have shaped your academic success. I am requesting your participation. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. No one will know that you are part of this study and responses to interview questions will be kept strictly confidential.

Risks/Benefits: There is a small possibility that you may experience discomfort or frustration as you think about your school experiences and attitudes about school; however, you are free to stop participating in the individual interview at any time. There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but the results from this research will help educators learn more about the things schools can do to foster academic success. It is hoped that this information will help administrators programs that are designed to help increase the academic resilience of students.

Compensation: Once you complete the individual interview, whether it is completed or not, you will be given a Barnes and Noble twenty dollar gift certificate.

Confidentiality: Information gathered from the individual interview will be kept confidential. The consent forms will be kept in a sealed envelope inside a locked file drawer, and will not be tied to your interview responses. A code will be set for you, which you will be asked to keep. No one at the school will know your code.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate, please check the box below that says, "I agree to participate in this study". Even if you agree to participate, you are free to stop at any time without penalty. Choosing not to participate or not completing the survey will not impact your grade in Advisory or in any other class.

Contacts and Questions: If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Rebecca Testa Ryan through email rtestaryan@yahoo.com or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Amy Heineke, at aheineke@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola's Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

If you agree to participate in this study, please check the box, print your name and sign below. If you prefer not to participate, please raise your hand and you will be escorted back to your Advisory class. There is no penalty for choosing not to participate in this study.

I agree to participate in this study. Yes No

_____ Print your name

_____ Signature

_____ Date

APPENDIX D
PARENT CONSENT FORM

Project Title: ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF
LATINA STUDENTS

Researcher(s): Rebecca Testa-Ryan, Doctoral Student, Loyola University of Chicago

Faculty Sponsor: Amy Heineke, PhD, Department of Education, Loyola University of
Chicago

Introduction:

You are being asked to allow your child to take part in a research study being conducted by Rebecca Testa-Ryan, for a dissertation study under the supervision of Amy Heineke, PhD in the Department of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. You are being asked to allow your child to participate because of your child's academic success at Urban public high school. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to allow your child to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how the family, school, community, and society contribute to the academic success of Latina students.

Procedures:

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

- To participate in an interview with the researcher, which will last approximately 60 minutes.
- Agree to have interview audio taped.

Risks/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in having your child participate in this research be-yond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to your child from participation, but your child's participation in this study will benefit the impact teachers will have on student achievement and parental involvement in the future.

Compensation:

If your child participates in the interview process of this research project he/she will receive a twenty dollar gift certificate for Barnes and Noble.

Confidentiality:

- Please be assured that the collection information will be kept highly confidential. Your child's identity will not be disclosed at any time and data will be coded so that no actual names will appear on any documents or forms generated from the study.
- Access to the audio-taped transcriptions will be available only to the researcher and members of her dissertation team. Audio-tapes and transcripts will be stored in a secure location and eventually destroyed one year after the termination of this study.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want your child to be in this study, you do not have to give consent. Even if you decide to allow your child to participate, your child is 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 Rebecca Testa-Ryan at (773) 991-5993 or rtestaryan@yahoo.com or faculty sponsor Amy Heineke, PhD at aheineke@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.

Yes, I will allow my child to participate in this research study.

No, I will not allow my child to participate in this research study.

Parent's Signature _____ Date _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Interview Protocol

Project: ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF LATINA STUDENTS

Interview #: _____ **Date:** _____ **Time:** _____ **Location:** _____

Release form signed? _____

Script:

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. I believe your experiences will be valuable to this research and in helping guiding academic success among Latina students. The interview will take about 60 minutes and will include questions to understand how family, school, community, society helped to your academic success. As I mentioned in our previous conversation, I would like to accurately document the information you state, so I would like your permission to tape record this interview. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and family, school, community, and society contribute to your academic success.

At this time I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the research project: ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF LATINA STUDENTS You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses. Thank you.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, or reschedule for a different time, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Part I- General:

1. You are participating in this study today because you are academically successful in high school. Although you have faced many obstacles you are able to keep up academically and succeed. Why do you think you have received good grades?
2. Are there any particular people or resources that have helped you get good grades in high school?

Part II – Experiences in Home

1. Tell me how life at home gives you the ability to be academically successful?
2. What is it like for you when you speak to your parent(s)/guardian(s) about high school? What are some topics you talk about concerning school? Do your parents/guardians ask you about how and what you are learning in school? Can they help you academically? How so? (i.e., help with homework; volunteer at school; etc.)?

3. What are some of the beliefs, if any, do you hear about school while growing up in your home?
4. How, if at all, does your relationship with your parent(s)/guardian(s) support your academic success in high school?
 - a. How does lessons/guidance from parents/guardians change your thoughts and/or feelings about education?
 - b. How, if at all, do your parent(s)/guardian(s) parenting skills (i.e., guidance, discipline, and expectations) guide you to your school success in high school?
5. What resources, if any, are available to you in your home (access to books, internet, etc.) that helped to your school success in high school? If any, how did you use them?

Part III – Experiences in School

1. Explain some of the resources at your high school to help you succeed in school?
 - a. What are some of the most important resources at your high school (i.e., staff, policies, practices, etc.) that help you succeed in school?
 - b. What information, if any, did you hear about college while attending your high school?
 - c. How did that information direct your thoughts and/or feelings about education?
2. Are there any school staff members (teachers, administrators, staff, counselors, coaches, social workers, mentor, volunteer, etc.), who helped in getting your school success in high school? If so, how?
 - a. Describe your relationship, if any, with a school staff member who added to your school success during high school.
3. What extracurricular activities, if any, did you participate in that helped shape your school success in high school?
 - a. How did these extracurricular activities add to your school success in high school?
4. What student supports services (i.e., social, academic, tutoring), if any, at your high school added to your school success in high school?
5. Were there any certain school and/or classroom traits (rigors curriculum, high qualified/experienced teachers, instructional resources, school safety, high teacher expectations, classroom size, etc.), that added to your school success in high school?
 - a. If so which characteristics and how did they encourage your success?

Part IV – Experiences in the Community

1. What are some of the resources in your neighbor/community that helps you get good grades in high school?

What information/lessons, if any, did you hear about education while growing up in your community?

 - a. How did that information/lessons shape your thoughts and/or feelings about education?
2. Are there any community members (friends, servant leaders, neighbors, etc.), who added to your school success in high school? If so how?
 - a. Describe your relationship, if any, with a community member who added to your school success.
3. Where there any community organizational/institutions/services (religious institutions, recreational facilities, youth organizations, child care services, etc) that helped shape your school success in high school? If so how?

- a. What supports/resources were available to you in the community?

Part V – Future Focused Questions:

1. What do city Latina senior students need in order to do well at school in the future?
2. How has your experiences at home, school, and the community during high school (9-12) prepared you to be a successful student?
3. Now that you are a senior what do you think are some school challenges for you?
 - a. How will you handle those challenges?

Part V - Closure:

1. Tell me about something that was important in your school success during high school that I may have forgotten to ask.

APPENDIX F

SOCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDER PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF LATINA STUDENTS

Researcher(s): Rebecca Testa-Ryan, Doctoral Student, Loyola University of Chicago

Faculty Sponsor: Amy Heineke, PhD, *Department of Education*, Loyola University of Chicago

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Rebecca Testa-Ryan, for a dissertation study under the supervision of Amy Heineke, PhD in the Department of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. A college-bound student chose you as an influential person who helped guide them towards their academic success. It is important to know how you were so influential and what are some of the factors you contributed toward this student's success. 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 gain a better understanding of how the impact family, school, community, and society contribute to the academic success of Latina students.

Procedures:

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

- To participate in an interview with the researcher, which will last approximately 20 minutes.
- Agree to have interview audio taped.

Risks/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in having your child participate in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to your child from participation, but your child's participation in this study will benefit the impact teachers will have on student achievement and parental involvement in the future.

Confidentiality:

- Please be assured that the collection information will be kept highly confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed at any time and data will be coded so that no actual names will appear on any documents or forms generated from the study.
- Access to the audio-taped transcriptions will be available only to the researcher and members of her dissertation team. Audio-tapes and transcripts will be stored in a secure location and eventually destroyed one year after the termination of this study.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to give consent. 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 Rebecca Testa-Ryan at (773) 991-5993 or rtestaryan@yahoo.com or faculty sponsor Amy Heineke, PhD at aheineke@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.

Participant's Signature _____ **Date** _____

Researcher's Signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX G

SOCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDER RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Social Support Provider,

My name is Rebecca Testa-Ryan and I am a doctoral student, under the supervision of Amy Heineke, PhD from the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. My dissertation study is designed to understand how family, school, community, and society help make you successful students. Through my research, I would like to answer the following question:

(1) How have family, school, community, and society help the academic success of college-bound, Latina students attending an urban public high school?

(2) What do social support providers believe is important for the academic success of college-bound, Latina students attending an urban public high school?

Social support providers are being asked by this researcher to participate in this study. The interview is designed to gain insight into how you were instrumental in guiding a Latina student to become academically successful. I am requesting your participation. The interview will take approximately 20 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. No one will know you are in this study and responses to interview questions will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate, please respond via email at rtestaryan@yahoo.com with Latina Resilience Social Support in the subject line and I will contact you to schedule an interview time that will be convenient for you.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Rebecca Testa-Ryan, Researcher

APPENDIX H
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF LATINA STUDENTS

Researcher(s): Rebecca Testa-Ryan, Doctoral Student, Loyola University of Chicago

Faculty Sponsor: Amy Heineke, PhD, Department of Education, Loyola University of Chicago

Introduction: You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Rebecca Testa-Ryan, for a dissertation study under the supervision of Amy Heineke, PhD in the Department of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. You are being asked to participate because of you were named as an instrumental social support provider that helped foster the academic resilience of a student attending Urban public high school. 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 gain a better understanding of the impact ecological factors contribute to the academic resilience of Latina students.

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

- To participate in an interview with the researcher, which will last approximately 20 minutes.
- Agree to have interview audio taped.

Risks/Benefits: There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but your participation in this study will benefit the impact teachers will have on student achievement and parental involvement in the future.

Confidentiality:

- Please be assured that the collection information will be kept highly confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed at any time and data will be coded so that no actual names will appear on any documents or forms generated from the study.
- Access to the audio-taped transcriptions will be available only to the researcher and members of her dissertation team. Audio-tapes and transcripts will be stored in a secure location and eventually destroyed five years after the termination of this study.

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 Rebecca Testa-Ryan at (773) 991-5993 or rtestaryan@yahoo.com or faculty sponsor Amy Heineke, PhD at aheineke@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.

Social Support Provider Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX I

SOCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Project: ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF LATINA STUDENTS

Interview #: _____ **Date:** _____ **Time:** _____ **Location:** _____

Release form signed? _____

Script:

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. I believe your experiences will be valuable to this research and in helping guiding academic success among Latina students. The interview will take about 20 minutes and will include questions to understand how family, school, community, society can help students be successful at school. As I mentioned in our previous conversation, I would like to accurately document the information you state, so I would like your permission to tape record this interview. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and family, school, community, and society contribute to your academic success.

At this time I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the research project: ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF LATINA STUDENTS You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses. Thank you.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, or reschedule for a different time, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Social Support Interview Questions

1. Why do you believe (identified participant) is doing well in school?
2. Why do you think your relationship with (identified participant) has helped him/her succeed at school in spite of the risks in their family, school, community, or society?
3. What are some specific ways in which you have helped (identified participant) succeed at school in spite of the risks in their family, school, community, or society?
4. What can other encouraging adults do to help children and adolescents succeed at school in spite of personal, school, community, or societal risks?
5. Is there anything that you would like to add at this time?

APPENDIX J
THANK YOU CORRESPONDENCE

Thank you for participating in this study about the ways in which ecological factors contribute to the academic success of urban Latina high school students.

I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this important research study. Your experiences on how you overcame adversity and achieved academic success is critical for identifying the environmental protective factors that promote resilience and has the potential to inform all stakeholders to create programs to help facilitate academic success.

I hope that this study will be useful for all stakeholders in their efforts to strengthen and build home-school-community partnerships which provide more comprehensive services to underserved urban youth and their families. I am especially confident that this research will assist educators and policy makers to design strategies and programs to aid high-achieving Latinas students who face adversity in an urban setting.

Thank you again for participating in this important research. Your participation to this important research is invaluable for helping urban youth and their families in the future. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me; you can do so by emailing or calling Rebecca Testa-Ryan.

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