2014

Examining Latino a First-Generation College Students' Educational Resilience at a Jesuit Post-Secondary Institution

Diana Chavez

Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1256

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.

Copyright © 2014 Diana Chavez
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

EXAMINING LATINO/A FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS’ EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE AT A JESUIT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION

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

BY

DIANA CHÁVEZ

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate my dissertation to my family who I thought of on two occasions, day and night, as I persisted toward this educational achievement. For my mother, Margaret Vallejo Chávez, thank you for always having time for me and supporting my goals and dreams. God’s grace in my life began with blessing me with you as my mother. For my father, Francisco Chávez, gracias por ensarme que la fuerza es adentro. My life and all that I am is a reflection of my parents’ love, support and hard work. Thank you for giving me roots and wings. With all my love, I share this dissertation with my little-big-sister Daniela Chávez, my inspiration and strength for my postsecondary degree aspirations. Thank you for your honesty and loving me unconditionally – you make me a better person. For my sister Priscilla Chávez and nephews, Nathan, Dillion, Brian, Fabian and Nicholas, thank you for your kind love and joy in my educational journey.

Proverbs 11:14 says, “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” Dr. Stella Silva, without you there would be no Ph.D. You are my educational inspiration! Immense love and respect to you for role modeling Latina Ph.D. persistence. Dr. Bridget Turner Kelly, thank you advising me to a place of authenticity. I am so grateful to you for motivating me to develop my own educational resilience, and see my light. Dr. Stephanie Stewart, thank you for showing me that
everyone in life is an educator, and the value of caring and supporting others. Dr. Anita Thomas, I cannot thank you enough for encouraging me to continue and to see not only this study to completion, but to see myself in the end. Dr. Maria Vidal de Haymes, much gratitude to you for helping me make sense of my Latina Ph.D. experience. Our conversations helped me to progress with purpose.

Dr. John Dugan, thank you for the validation from beginning to end. You taught me many lessons, but particularly that change is growth that comes from a place of courage. Dr. Michael Beazley, my cohort, Sage, and best friend in this experience. Thank you for helping me, always having the confidence that I would finish, and reminding me to have faith in myself. Dr. Kenechukwu (K.C.) Mmeje much gratitude to you for encouraging and inspiring me to persist. You motivated me to feel the joy in my progress, however small. Roslyn Castañeda and AJ Ruiz thank you for being my friends and support system. Roslyn, my best friend, thank you for standing by me all these years and your pride in me has centered me, and made me feel connected to the person I was prior to this journey. I love you Roslyn, much gratitude to you for the unconditional love, loyal friendship and shipping me tamales!! Jacinto Ybarra, you will always be one of my best friends. Thank you for never letting me forget that I am blessed with the will and grace. I gained immense strength from our friendship - happiness is within, and not our circumstances. Tasha Marie Silvas, your life will forever inspire me to be surrounded by: family, laughter, love, honesty and dance. Joe Saucedo and Cat Ruiz, I appreciate you letting me take care of your babies, Monty and Charlie - my pet therapy. Meeting you two was one of the best gifts of this experience. Joe, my San Antonio hermano, our
conversations were always moments of inspiration. They were reminders of where I came from and appreciation for God’s blessings.

While “it takes a long time for a woman to realize it's okay to be a Chingona” (Sandra Cisneros), my view and self-confidence grew because of the following phenomenal mujeres who have enriched my life, and use their talents and abilities to make the work a better place. Dr. Jennifer Cossyleon during this experience you have become one of my best friends. Thank for being my Latina Ph.D. hermana! You have sat by side in time of stress and encouraged me to voice and feel my emotions, but not let them stop me from achieving my blessings. I appreciate you and now I can say “Evelyn and I are waiting for you.” Dr. De’Sha Wolf, I love you for supporting me to recognize that I am capable of more than my thoughts, and to embrace God’s Grace in my life. I am grateful for your patience, honesty, and helping me “stay out of crazy.”

Dr. Danielle Alsandor my spiritual and “Jesus take the wheel” friend, thank you for processing with me that every life experience is a divine moment, leading me to grow into a deeper and richer spiritual being. Shaunyale Canada, my phenomenal friend thank you for remaining in my life during this time, and teaching me the importance of living with intention, and uplifting our girlfriends. Dr. Deanna Johnson, our conversations during this time always generated much needed laughter, and have made me feel better and understood. Yanika Daniels, thank you for helping me recognize that value of people and friendship regardless of time and distance. I appreciate you for thinking and supporting me across the miles.
To the Ladies of Sigma Lambda Gamma National Sorority, Inc., specifically my line sisters: Diana Franchini, mi Tocaya, I love you and am grateful to you for inspiring self-love, female empowerment and embracing our Latina identidad y coraje to bring about self-growth. Thank you Franchini for your unconditional love, and believing in me when I did believe in myself. Ivonne Espada, I have always deeply felt your support, positive energy and commitment to empower all women. You will always be mi Presidenta! Pamela Alvarado, thank for creating a friendship of sharing our Chicana vulnerabilities and fears, while reminding one another: la raza, vale la pena, y ser cabrona es un honor. Claradina Hinojosa, spiritual advisor and fellow “Tejana,” gracias for teaching me to walk in faith. Mariana Ruano and Elizabeth Villatoro Chajón “Chula”, your excitement and positive energy about working towards this goal helped me continue. Gracias Mis Chulas!!

Dr. Micaela “Micki” Vargas, thank you for encouraging me to “man-up”, be brave and move forward with confidence. Laura M. Bohórquez García, thank you for always showing up to support me. You are a powerful role model and I thank you for your encouragement. Mandaline Dunn, Yay! Class of 2014!! Thank you for encouraging my path towards health and wellness, during this journey. You have been a great role model and friend. Rachel Anderson, your friendship and spirit enabled me to think about this experience through positive affirmations. Thank you for your encouragement and support. Pamela Johnson, thank you for role modeling the importance of finding joy and appreciation for my own solitude and growth in this journey. Martha Espinosa, I appreciate you cheering me on, and the hopefulness you expressed about me “almost
being done.” Gracias for the reminder. Marcela Gallegos, I appreciate you for providing me spaces at Loyola to share my Latino/a academic experiences. Gracias Damas!

M. “Foster” H., thank you again, and again…to you, my Glenda “the good witch,” for always reminding me that I had the power within and the ruby slippers. Fr. Justin Daffron, thank your for your support of my academic and professional journey. Your trust in my ability gave me a new sense of confidence to move forward. Derrick Gunter, thank you for your understanding during my final year, and for imparting upon me a new level of supporting and loving students. Joe J. Palencia, gracias for inspiring me by sharing your Latino first-generation college student story and always reminding me to “echale ganas y pa’lante!” DeMico Davis, our talks about God, emotional and physical wellness provided great motivation to finish in a healthy space. God bless you for being my role model and my teacher.

Annie Morgan, thank you for keeping me on your prayer board, for years, and reminding me of it, often. Thanks to the Loyola community for helping me recruit my student study participants: Sadika Sulaiman Hara – Student Diversity & Multicultural Affairs; Adrienne Jaroch; Dr. Shawna Cooper-Gibson - School of Communications; and Robbie Jones - School of Education.

For my student research participants, no words can express my thanks to you for taking the time, during finals, to share your stories: Trillion, Emilio, Mayra, Alejandro, Hector, Andrea, Betty, Emely, Treasure, Janet, Jacquelyn, Marco, Miguel, Jerica, Ramon, Frida, Edgar, Crystal, Adriana. I am forever grateful to each of you for helping me achieve my educational goal!
My utmost thanks to God, for answering my prayers and tears. You have blessed me beyond my own vision and understanding. Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD. "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."
Para Mi Familia… Mommy, Dad, Daniela, y Priscilla
Con todo mi corazón le doy gracias a mi familia por todo que me han dado, este grado es nuestro logro.
¡Si Se Puede! Cesar Chávez
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iii

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................... xiv

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. xv

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. xvi

CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT AND PROBLEM ....................................................................... 1
  Study Background .................................................................................................................. 2
    Latino/as’ U.S. Population and Post-secondary Enrollment .............................................. 2
    First-generation College Students and Latino/as ............................................................. 5
    Social Mobility, Economic Benefits and Postsecondary Education ............................... 7
    Economic Benefits ........................................................................................................... 8
  Problem Statement ............................................................................................................ 9
    Examining Cognitive and Non-cognitive Factors ............................................................ 9
    Latino/as and Non-cognitive Factors ............................................................................. 12
    Non-cognitive Factors and Resilience Qualities ............................................................ 14
    Overcoming Risk ............................................................................................................ 17
  Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................ 19
  Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 20
  Definitions .......................................................................................................................... 21
    First-generation College Student ............................................................................... 21
    At-risk Population .......................................................................................................... 21
    Lived Experience ........................................................................................................... 22
    Resilience ....................................................................................................................... 22
    Educational Resilience ............................................................................................... 22
    Persistence ...................................................................................................................... 22
  Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 23
  Understanding Persistence - Student’s Perspective .......................................................... 26
  Study Organization ......................................................................................................... 28

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................... 29
  First-Generation College Students Pre-college Characteristics ....................................... 32
  First-Generation College Students’ In-college Characteristics ......................................... 34
  Significance of Race in Studies of First-Generation College Students ............................ 37
  Latino/as’ U.S. Population and Postsecondary Enrollment ............................................ 39
  Latino/a Educational Pipeline – Secondary and Higher Education ................................ 41
    Latino/as in Secondary Education ............................................................................. 42
    Latino/as in Higher Education .................................................................................... 43
  Latino/a Research within Higher Education and Non-cognitive Factors ....................... 45
    Self-efficacy .................................................................................................................... 46
    Parents ............................................................................................................................ 48
    Outstanding Work Ethic .............................................................................................. 49
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 100
Research Method ...................................................................................... 101
Phenomenology........................................................................................... 101
Methods of Data Collection ...................................................................... 103
Guided In-depth Individual Interviews ....................................................... 103
Research Student Participants ................................................................... 105
Study Procedure .......................................................................................... 107
In-depth Individual Interviews ................................................................... 108
Student Confidentiality ............................................................................. 109
Informational Survey .................................................................................. 110
Consent Form ............................................................................................... 110
Interview Procedure ................................................................................... 111
Study Site .................................................................................................... 111
Data Analysis ............................................................................................... 113
External Auditor ......................................................................................... 116
Limitations ................................................................................................... 117
Generalizability ........................................................................................... 117
Researcher Bias .......................................................................................... 119
Validity ........................................................................................................ 121
Trustworthiness ........................................................................................... 123
**Summary of Future Research** .......................................................... 224
**Limitations and Strengths** ............................................................. 224
**Personal Reflections** .................................................................. 227

**APPENDIX A: STUDENT RECRUITMENT E-MAIL** ......................... 232
**APPENDIX B: STUDENT PARTICIPANT SURVEY** .......................... 235
**APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT** .......................................... 237
**APPENDIX D: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS** .... 242
**REFERENCES** ............................................................................... 250
**VITA** .......................................................................................... 272
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant Demographics ............................................................................. 130
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model of Human Development
Informed by Present Study’s Findings........................................................................... 196
ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused on exploring and understanding Latino/a first-generation college students’ process for drawing or enabling educational resilience to persist and achieve their postsecondary education degree. Using Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Paradigm as the framework, the study explored how interactions between individuals and their environments influenced their persistence outcomes. Using purposeful sampling, 19 juniors and seniors attending a Midwest, private, religiously-affiliated university were selected to participate. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted during one-on-one meetings.

Findings indicated that Latino first-generation college students drew on or were enabled by internal (e.g., first-generation status, self-identified academic challenges, sense of purpose) and external resources (e.g., parents’ hard work ethic, peers, faculty, and financial aid). The central comprehensive finding was that by drawing on the internal and external resources, the students demonstrated educational resilience and persisted to graduation.

The findings implied that Latino first-generation college students utilized various individuals and resources from their environments, regardless of knowledge, distance or time, to draw on and enable their educational resilience. The present study was conducted to expand knowledge on how student’s internal processes influenced their persistence,
and to aid post-secondary institutions in developing strategies that can help these students approach and handle social and academic challenges.
CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXT AND PROBLEM

This dissertation study concentrates on the educational resilience of Latino/a first-generation college students. The study seeks to learn how Latino/a first-generation college students, who are considered at-risk for not achieving a college degree, persist toward a college degree. First-generation college students are defined as students whose parents do not have post-secondary or college experiences (Billson & Terry, 1982; Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Through a qualitative approach, this study intends to explain how Latino/a first-generation college students obtain a college degree by examining how non-cognitive factors contribute to achieving educational resilience.

This dissertation incorporates psychological and postsecondary education literature to illustrate the connection between educational resilience and post-secondary education. Collectively, these fields demonstrate that by drawing on non-cognitive elements, Latino/a first-generation college students overcome factors that researchers found puts them at a higher risk of not attaining a college degree. Thus, this chapter describes the need to position and identify how non-cognitive factors aid Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence to achieving their degree. Latino/a first-generation college students are situated within an at-risk context, yet despite being
positioned to yield to their deficits, non-cognitive elements enable them to achieve academic success. This allows for understanding how some Latino/a students use their first-generation college student identity, and the attributes associated with it, as assets rather than deficits. This study demonstrates that given the significance non-cognitive features are shown to contribute to Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence, more research is needed. Thus, comprehensively examining Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence, within an educational resilience framework, is valuable for its emphasis on overcoming risk and consideration of non-cognitive factors implemented to achieve academic success. Finally, the research questions guiding this project are presented and described, along with important terms that are relevant to this study.

Study Background

Latino/as’ U.S. Population and Post-secondary Enrollment

Latino/as’ consistent growth over the last ten years established them as the largest and fastest growing U.S. minority group. The nation’s increasing population is attributed predominantly to Latino/as’ 56% growth rate between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In 2003, the U.S. Census established that Latino/as were the nation’s largest racial/ethnic minority group, surpassing African Americans, with their numbers expected to increase (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). By 2010, the U.S. Census identified that Latino/as were the fastest growing minority population in the United States at 50.5 million, and that they comprised 16% of the total U.S. population. Further, one in six U.S. residents was identified as being Latino/a (U.S. Census, 2010). The swelling
population of Latino/as is significant because it is a foreshadowing for the impact they will have on post-secondary education.

Latino/as are projected to be a dominant presence in the U.S. educational pipeline, as the largest numbers of school-aged children will be from this population. The Latino/a population has not only grown by 43% in all U.S. states, but the number of Latino/a children under the age of 18 also increased by 38% (Pew Hispanic Center 2011). This is an unsurprising but notable growth rate for any ethnic/minority group. When considering that Latino/a school age children will continue on to high school, and are the impending group to enroll into college, their educational progress becomes particularly urgent. Among children under the age of 18 (23.1%), one in four children are Latino/as, and in Texas, California and New Jersey the ratio is one in two (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Also, one in three students between five and 24 years of age will be Latino in less than 20 years (Tienda, 2009). These numbers prefigure that large numbers of Latino/as are on the educational pathway, and situated to vie for a college degree. By the year 2020, Latino/a students are expected to increase their post-secondary enrollment to 46%, higher than any other U.S. ethnic group (Projections of Education Statistics, 2011).

Despite the growth, the unyielding reality is that Latino/as’ human capital and contribution to U.S. society may be limited because they lag in post-secondary degree achievement (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011). In 2008, the number of Latino/as enrolled in post-secondary institutions was 26%, a 10% increase from 1980 (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). However, recent data suggest that postsecondary educational enrollment is on the increase for Latino/as. First, the Latino/a high school dropout rate is at a historic low and
is falling at record levels, decreasing to 15% in 2012 from 32% in 2000, a faster decrease than any other ethnic group (Lopez & Fry, 2013). As a continuation to the Latino/a high school drop-out rate, for three consecutive years Latino/a college enrollment has increased to 19% in 2013 up from 12% in 2008, while non-Latino/as’ enrollment has decreased (Lopez & Fry, 2013). However, while these trends show that secondary and postsecondary education is important to Latino/a, they are lagging behind other ethnic groups when earning a degree. For example, in 2012, 14% of Latino/as earned a bachelor’s degree, in comparison to 51% of Asian Americans, 34.5% of White people and 21.2% of African Americans (Lopez & Fry, 2013).

The above statistics are consistent with what other researchers have identified over the last 30 years. Between the years 1976 and 2008, Latino/as along with Asian/Pacific Islanders had the fastest increase in undergraduate enrollment, yet only 13% of the Latino/a population achieved a bachelor’s degree, less than other major ethnic groups (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Thus, as the Latino/a population continues to increase, “higher education’s success in ensuring Latino/a educational achievement will become an increasingly important benchmark for assessing its contributions to the economics and civic health of this country” (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003, p. 41). As shown here, while a large number of Latino/as are expected to be in the educational pipeline, past and current research findings suggest that they will achieve post-baccalaureate degrees at lower rates. If these post-baccalaureate trends continue, the U.S. Latino/a population will miss the postsecondary education experience and academic achievement, which is not beneficial to them, their communities or overall society.
First-generation College Students and Latino/as

The sub-group of Latino/as who earn postsecondary education degrees at particularly low rates includes those who fall under the first-generation college student population. Research indicated that 39% of Latino/a mothers, and 41% of Latino/a fathers have an education level of less than a high school diploma (Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups, 2010). The fact that their parents have less than a high-school education is most significant for postsecondary education given their large U.S. population increase (Bernstein & Bergman, 2003; Passell & Cohn, 2011), and the number of first-generation college students (Terenzini et al., 1996) entering colleges are reportedly are more likely to be Latino/a (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001) and women (Saenz et al., 2007). However, data reveals that while Latino/as will account for the highest amount of growth in college enrollment at post-secondary institutions between 2004-2015 (Hussar & Bailey, 2006), they are not graduating at similarly high rates (Fry, 2002; Ryu, 2010).

The beginning of the academic struggle for first-generation college students is that they do not enter post-secondary institutions without particular academic and college proficiencies. For example, research has identified that first-generation college students have such academic deficits as lower SAT/ACT scores and high school grade point average (GPA) (Riehl, 1994; Warburton et al., 2001) and/or lower critical thinking skills, less family support (Terenzini et al., 1996). Also, they possess little knowledge about college cost, college applications and being a successful student (Pascarella, Pierson,
Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004), and/or are unfamiliar with the college culture (Davis, 2010; Rendon, 1996; Weis, 1992). The above description provides a context for why Latino/as within the first-generation college student population have particular post-secondary challenges.

Latino/as (38.2%), followed by African Americans (22.6%), Asians/Asian Americans (19.0%), Native Americans (16.8%), and White people (13.2%) are the largest populations of first-generation college students today (Saenz et al., 2007). Over the past 35 years, while the proportion of first-generation college students among the other racial groups has decreased, Latino/a numbers have remained the highest within the first-generation college student population, and complete post-secondary degrees at lower rates than other racial/ethnic groups (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Latino/as constitute 12.9% of post-secondary students enrolled in post-secondary institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). In 2007, a smaller percentage of Latino/a (7.5%) students enrolled in four year post-baccalaureate institutions achieved a degree compared to African Americans (8.9%) and Whites (67%) (Ryu, 2010). Further, 12% of Latino/as between ages 25 to 29 have a bachelor’s degree, in comparison to 37% of White people (Aud, Hussar, Planty, & Snyder, 2010). For those Latino/a first-generation college students who enroll in postsecondary education institutions, research showed that this group is especially vulnerable academically to not achieving a post-secondary degree. These differences advance the need to increase an understanding of Latino/a first-generation college students who do attain a post-secondary degree.
Social Mobility, Economic Benefits and Postsecondary Education

In today’s knowledge-based economy, a college degree is critical to success in a competitive workforce (Santiago, Kienzi, Sponsier, & Bowles, 2010). By 2018, 60% of U.S. jobs will require a post-secondary degree (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Unfortunately, while 89% of Latino/a youth agree that attaining a post-secondary degree is important to advance in life, less than half of 18 to 25 year olds plan to achieve a degree (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Latino/as educational or economic advances may limit personal, social and societal advances they are able to make during their lifespan. Latino/as’ lack of education will disadvantage them, as persons who achieve a post-secondary degree have an enhanced quality of life, higher earnings annually and employment prospects (Williams & Swail, 2005), which results in their upward social mobility. A college education also offers societal advantages to persons and the public at large. A society of educated people yields individuals more likely to participate in “political, societal, and economic functions that actualize the democratic ideals of the United States (i.e., justice, peace, due process, honesty, egalitarianism, and human rights)” (Nevarez & Rico, 2007, p. 3). In particular, first-generation college students who achieve a post-secondary degree reap increased personal status as leaders within their families (Terenzini, 1996). Considering that Latino/a first-generation college students are in jeopardy of not attaining post-secondary education, it signifies that the individual and society will not obtain the myriad of benefits gained from the degree. A population whose members do not attain a post-secondary degree yields negative economic benefit
for both the individual and society (Couturier, & Cunningham, 2006). When populations are minimally educated, societies do not fare well in various forms.

**Economic Benefits**

A culture with educated people achieves great gains. For example, a population with advanced degrees means saving public spending in areas including welfare, health care and law enforcement (Nevarez & Rico, 2007). This arises because individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to be employed full-time and year-round (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). However, the U.S. population falls short in achieving advanced degrees, which creates a critical threat to the nation’s economic welfare (Reindl, 2007). Progressing educationally is especially compelling when considering post-secondary disparities among socio-economic and racial groups (Reindl, 2007). Although low-income and minority populations are increasing at fast rates, these groups’ educational attainment is not advancing at frequencies that parallel their growth (Reindl, 2007). As the U.S. moves forward in educating and advancing the population, it should be reminded that “the United States successfully addressed the economic, demographic, and technological challenges of the 19th and 20th centuries” (Reindl, 2007, p. 6) by creating educational opportunities for women and people of color by expanding access to postsecondary education through the development of land grant institutions, the GI Bill and community colleges (Reindl, 2007). Thus, when considering the Latino/a population, their educational attainment reaffirms the need to gain insight from those who do achieve a degree. Training and educating the United States’ future workforce requires attention toward Latino/as, which has been determined to be the largest minority group of students
going through elementary and secondary schools (Nevarez & Rico, 2007). By 2020, the Latino/a labor will increase from 14.8% to 18.6%, and their work potential is expected to increase 34% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Thus, in order for the U.S. to face future national and global challenges, educators and policymakers must examine and understand Latino/a persistence in distinct ways.

**Problem Statement**

**Examining Cognitive and Non-cognitive Factors**

While researchers closely examine every facet of a student’s life to understand the relationship between the student and academic outcomes, cognitive aptitudes are typically assessed. Numerous researchers have devoted themselves to researching non-cognitive factors to test students’ retention and persistence. For instance, high school GPA, courses completed, rigor of high school curriculum, and college admissions tests (Adelman, 2006; Kern, Fagley, & Miller, 1998; Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, Langley, & Carlstrom, 2004; Tinto, 1993) are all factors consistently examined. The literature frequently asserted that cognitive factors, such as high school GPAs (Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Lanie & Lightsey, 1972) and SAT and ACT scores (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 1995; Fleming & Garcia, 1998; Fleming & Morning, 1998; Wright, Palmer, & Miller, 1996) positively predict academic success within postsecondary institutions. Although cognitive factors are important to research, despite the attention given to exploring these factors by researchers and policymakers, “student graduation rates have remained fairly consistent for more than three decades” (American Association of State College and Universities, 2005, p. 2). Thus, many questions remain about cognitive factors’ ability to explain
retention and persistence, and for this reason it is logical for expanding research on non-cognitive factors in order to further understand persistence. Researchers argued that evaluating non-cognitive variables along with cognitive variables is necessary, and enhance the capability to predict which students will fail or succeed in college (Duran, 1986; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Sedlacek, 2004; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984). Wright (1982) identified that cognitive or aptitude variables could account for no more than 50% of the variance in students’ collegiate performance, which suggests that non-cognitive variables could impact academic variance.

Thus, non-cognitive aspects could be just as important for understanding perseverance because many of the cognitive predictors of retention and attrition, such as GPA and standardized test scores, do not adequately determine student persistence (Scheetz, 1987; Zimmerman, & Doolittle, 1981). Research on non-cognitive factors is important as it asserts that persistence is impacted by innumerable sources. Researchers contend that knowledge of non-cognitive variables’ influence is needed to bring awareness of how students fail and succeed in college and, to also supplement cognitive factors’ predictive influence (Duran, 1986; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Sedlacek, 2004; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984). Messick (1979) described 12 types of non-cognitive variables that could potentially affect school achievement: background variables, affects, attitudes/beliefs, interests, motivation, curiosity, temperament, social sensitivity, coping strategies, cognitive style, creativity and values. Other non-cognitive factors examined, are “the level of commitment of obtaining a degree, the level of academic self-confidence, academic skills (time management skills, study skills, study habits), and the
level of academic and social integration into the institution” (Lotkowski, Robbing, & Noeth, p. 4). Non-cognitive factors have been classified into two categories: personality factors and sociological detriments (Lavin, 1965). Specifically, Lavin (1965) maintained that some variables or factors that fall within the two above mentioned categories, such as economic status, gender or motivation are associated with academic success. Although Astin’s (1985) theory of student development emphasized that student involvement significantly influences postsecondary education students’ academic experiences other researchers have linked such non-cognitive factors such as attitude (Lavin, 1965), motivation (Lavin, 1965), academic aspirations (Munro, 1981; Rosen & Aneshensel, 1978) and parental influence (Munro, 1981; Rosen & Aneshensel, 1978) to students’ academic performance.

Support for non-cognitive factors explaining students’ persistence is sparse, especially from the point at which they enroll into postsecondary educational institutions. An example of this practice is that many undergraduate institutions rely primarily on cognitive measure as high school GPA and standardized test scores for admission. Several researchers found that such cognitive variables are predictive of students’ academic performance (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 1995; Fleming & Garcia, 1998; Fleming & Morning, 1998; Wright, Palmer, & Miller, 1996). Early on, this practice limits and minimizes non-cognitive elements’ credibility in explaining persistence.

Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) are pioneers for investigating how non-cognitive factors can predict academic achievement. In fact, the Non-cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) by Tracey and Sedlacek (1984; 1985; 1987), based on Sedlacek and Brooks
(1979), is one of the most popular non-cognitive surveys utilized today. The focus of the research was primarily based on non-traditional students, such as students of color. Even with support for the significance that non-cognitive elements may have on holistically understanding their influence on college students’ academic performance, more research needs to be conducted to capture their significance. Thus, this present study was executed with the intention to fill in such a research gap by examining Latino/a first-generation college students’ educational resilience.

**Latino/as and Non-cognitive Factors**

As way to inform research disparities on non-cognitive features, particularly as it relates to Latino/a students, this study will advance research in the area. As will be described here, researchers identified that non-cognitive factors contribute to Latino/a students overcoming academic and social challenges related to their first-generation college status. Students’ persistence is the result of longitudinal activities that vary in length in students’ academic lives (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp as cited in Seidman, 2005). Consequently, I argue that Latino/a first-generation college student persistence is uniquely influenced by non-cognitive factors, and that “measures of academic achievement are not sufficient in and of themselves to explain college attrition and nonacademic factors are import in understanding the attrition process” (Arbona & Novy, 1990, p. 415). By minimally considering the influence of non-cognitive factors, research on persistence is neglecting other contributing factors. Given that the scholarship identified that minority persistence could be explained by nonacademic or non-cognitive factors (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Sedlacek, 1987, 2004; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984, 1987,
1989; Zea, Jarma, & Bianchi, 1995), more research is needed. The thought is that the factors chosen to assess students’ persistence set the direction for the emphasis that an examination will yield.

While studies did assess non-cognitive factors, frequently those factors were seldom unpacked in reference to how they contextually impact persistence behaviors (Dennis, Phinney, & Chauteco, 2005; Phinney & Haas, 2003). Phinney and Haas (2003) advanced that “perceptions of stress, coping and success are difficult to untangle in research” (p. 712). Further, Phinney and Haas (2003) and Lazarus (2000) posited that measuring a psychological characteristic such as coping is difficult because of issues related to defining and measuring. Regardless, Bandura (1997) found that the self-worth someone possesses influences his or her outcomes. Dennis et al. (2005), in researching motivation, found there is minimal corroboration for the function that characteristics such as motivation have on the postsecondary education effects of first-generation college student ethnic minorities. This can be a drawback to understanding ethnic minority populations because Dennis et al. (2005) found that non-cognitive characteristics such as personal/career motivation do determine devotion to achieving a degree and college adjustment.

Student persistence is a complex and multidimensional process, and researchers should approach research from such a point. For populations such as Latino/as, research showed that their persistence is impacted by non-academic and non-cognitive factors (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Ceja, 2004; Gandara, 1982; Gonzalez, 2007; Hernandez, 2000; Morales, 2008). Thus, for such student populations as
Latino/as, a more holistic list of factors needs to be examined. Therefore, it is important to focus on the degree to which non-cognitive factors support the persistence of Latino/a first-generation college students; and thus produce a more holistic understanding of Latino/a first-generation college students.

**Non-cognitive Factors and Resilience Qualities**

Research, within postsecondary education, revealed that internal qualities, such as non-academic and non-cognitive sources, affect educational attainment in postsecondary institutions. In particular, educational resilience has been useful in applying a framework that examines how a population overcomes a specific risk factor, while using non-cognitive factors, to achieve academic success. The research indicated that risk factors, rather than functioning as deficits for Latino/a students, are forms of empowerment through the use of non-cognitive factors. While research on the role of non-cognitive factors in students is pivotal, research gaps exist with regard to non-cognitive factors, educational resilience and postsecondary education (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Ceja, 2004; Hernandez, 2000; Morales, 2008, Gandara, 1982; Gonzalez, 2007).

Thus, more information is needed, for the findings of those studies that do exist are useful. Studies applying an educational resilience framework identified that Latino/a students apply non-cognitive qualities to assist them in their persistence toward a college degree. Research found that non-cognitive qualities such as motivation (Ceja, 2004), self-identifying as “at-risk” (Morales, 2000), internal drive (Arellano & Padilla, 1996) and sense of purpose (Gonzalez, 2007) are non-cognitive qualities that manifest in
students’ college experiences and promote and influence persistence behaviors. For example, motivation realized by obtaining meaning from parents’ lived educational and work experiences were an impetus for students to enroll in college and achieve a degree (Ceja, 2004). The non-cognitive factor drive to succeed allowed students to have the self-determination to not give up and find ways to continue to academically push themselves (Arellano & Padilla, 1996). Identifying as at-risk has impelled students to rise above academic preparation for a college environment (Morales, 2000). Having a sense of purpose validated Latino/a students’ determination to achieve an advanced degree, for they viewed it as an opportunity to serve and represent their ethnicity on a community and societal level (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Gonzalez, 2007). This research is essential to corroborating that Latino/a students use non-cognitive resources to continue to pursue and attain a college degree.

Further postsecondary education studies, which did not utilize an educational resilience framework, identified that non-cognitive qualities affect students’ of color persistence. For example, Latino/a students with a positive outlook on their ability to attain a post-secondary degree positively contributed to their self-esteem and conviction that they could be educationally successful (Hernandez, 2000). Phinney and Hass (2003) identified that having a positive self-efficacy shaped students’ feelings of confidence and self-reliance, which ultimately predicted academic success. Parents who role modeled hard work positively influenced students’ academic performance (Gandara, 1982). Students who maintained a positive sense of self were also predisposed to successfully navigate college (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). These studies supported the above-mentioned
finding that non-academic traits are influential on Latino/a student persistence in a college environment. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) asserted that Latino/a persistence issues are influenced by a variety of factors because this group is heterogeneous.

Jointly, these studies in postsecondary education and educational resilience indicated that Latino/a persistence needs to be further understood through the examination of non-cognitive qualities. However, the limited number of studies in both fields creates an incomplete assessment on how non-cognitive qualities are exercised among Latino/a first-generation college students. Another gap in research is on studies that look at Latino/a first-generation college students, and consider how non-cognitive elements explain students’ academic success. As a result, research overlooked that “academic success is a function of both personal characteristics such as mental ability, academic skills, motivation, and goals, and the characteristics of the environment which can be conceptualized as a system of nested interdependence structures” (Muuss as cited in Dennis et al., 2005, p. 224). Research infrequently examined non-cognitive contextual factors that might influence Latino/a first-generation college students’ experience (Dennis et al., 2005). By not examining how non-academic sources influence Latino/a first-generation college students during their post-secondary experience, limited understanding is available about how these sources contribute to these students’ academic resilience. It is important to not ignore non-cognitive factors, and understand persistence from a holistic perspective. Thus, a framework, such as educational resilience, that examines how non-cognitive factors influences persistence is essential to fill research disparities that exist.
Thus, research called for examining how non-cognitive factors are an impetus for a student’s internal persistence. More needs to be known about how non-cognitive factors internally enable Latino/a first-generation college students to overcome traits that often hinder academic success. In doing so, findings on non-cognitive factors indicated that persistence research could be expanded to provide a more comprehensive and larger understanding on Latino/a first-generation college students.

**Overcoming Risk**

Finally, postsecondary education literature pertaining to the nature of how students overcome risk is nearly non-existent. The lack of attention is not advantageous to this population since researchers have defined at-risk college students as underprepared (Elliott, Godshall, Shrout, & Witty, 1990), underrepresented (Melendez, Falcon, & Montrichard, 2004) and underskilled (Thayer, 2000). Accordingly, it is justifiable to ascertain that not enough research is conducted on how Latino/a first-generation college students overcome or withstand risks, and more research is needed to identify the process by which Latino/a first-generation college students overcome risks during the course of a four to six year undergraduate experience. Resilience theory has been constructive in delving into how success is not always thwarted by risks. The resilience approach to examining risk is significant because it diverges from decades of research, which predominantly examined educational performance from a deficit position (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). For example, resilience theory has been used to consider risk factors or deficiencies such as poverty, neglect and lack of access to fundamental personal needs and how those shortfalls influence individuals’ academic
experience. Particularly, the educational resilience framework as described by Gordon (1994) is the process wherein students regarded as “at-risk” by school systems are able to be academically successful despite the low expectations. Gordon (1994) emphasized that acknowledging the risk factors that students of color maintain is important to identify positive contributing causes that lead to post-secondary graduation. Therefore, this study sets out to explore and gain descriptions of those contributing factors. It is important to also acknowledge and understand that disadvantage can enable success.

However, some research reported that individuals with risk factors were able to approach their educational endeavor in a positive way, despite or because of their at-risk status (Waxman et al., 2004). Researchers advocated that it is important to improve the education of the growing numbers of students at-risk of academic failure (Planta & Walsh, 1996; Waxman et al., 1991), and studying resilient students (Waxman et al., 2004) with at-risk factors is one way to find out how to improve the success of all students. Waxman et al. (2004) suggested that it is imperative that policymakers, administrators, teachers and parents understand how and why some students within a risk group, with similar socioeconomic backgrounds, home lives, ability and schools do well while their peers do not. Examining at-risk students has been identified as important because although educators cannot control community demographics and family conditions, they can change educational practices and policy in order to meet needs of those students at-risk of academic failure (Comer, 1987). Researchers posited that looking at-risk the way that educational resilience does serves as a “corrective lens—an awareness of the self-righting tendencies that move children toward normal adult
development under all but the most adverse circumstances” (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 202). In the same way, as this has been used to identify resilient children who were at-risk educationally, it is necessary to examine Latino/a first-generation college students who are at-risk of not completing college.

However, the minimal examination of college students from a framework like the educational resilience framework results in limited knowledge about how the phenomenon is executed at the post-secondary level. For example, research contended that resilient individuals seek communities that are supportive and conducive to growth (Mastern, 1994). Thus, for postsecondary education institutions it is imperative to gain descriptions of what those supportive and advantageous environments look like for Latino/a first-generation college students. Looking at-risk for Latino/a students is especially necessary to gain understanding of how this population manages and handles their first-generation risk factor as college students. By discounting the examination of persistence from a risk perspective we are overlooking a group, like Latino/a first-generation college students, who are predominantly described as at-risk of not attaining a post-secondary degree. Latino/a students, oftentimes, are automatically placed in the risk frame from their initial enrollment, thus examining persistence needs to commence from a framework that considers that how they succeed rather than what caused them to fail.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand educational resilience as described by Latino/a first-generation college students. Thus, the overarching research question seeks to understand how Latino/a students use non-
cognitive factors in the face of their first-generation and racial/ethnic status. Specifically, this study seeks to discern educational resilience from the perspective of Latino/a first-generation college students. Gaining these descriptions from Latino/a students is necessary to understand how they functioned within the risks that come with being a Latino/a first-generation student. By studying Latino/a students whose first-generation college student status was a form of empowerment, as post-secondary graduation candidates, the researcher aimed to learn about the essence of educational resilience and how to achieve it. The researcher sought to understand the non-cognitive and external resources that Latino/a first-generation college students utilized to arrive at educational resilience during their post-secondary experience.

**Research Questions**

Because there are few studies exploring Latino/a first-generation college students’ educational resilience, a phenomenological study with the purpose of attaining descriptions from this group best lent itself to examining the following two qualitative questions:

1. How and what internal resources do Latino/a First-generation college students draw on to demonstrate their education resilience?
2. How and what external resources do Latino/a First-generation college students internalize to demonstrate educational resilience?
Definitions

During the course of this study, several terms are used to describe populations or identify key concepts. These terms are defined below and attained directly from literature.

First-generation College Student

First-generation college students are defined as students whose parents do not have post-secondary or college experiences (Billson & Terry, 1982; Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Terenzini et al., 1996; Warburton et al., 2001). Parents or guardians of first-generation college students did not complete or achieve a four-year postsecondary educational degree.

At-risk Population

However, there are individuals who overcome the risk of being a Latino/a first-generation college student because of the cultural or academic knowledge due to their parents’ college achievement. Researchers assert that overcoming such odds are specifically related to a disadvantaged background and systematic environments (Masten, 1994). Specific to this study, at-risk is defined as a member of the Latino/a racial/ethnic group which has a record of low postsecondary education achievement. This group’s lower academic success is also connected to having limited cultural and academic capital knowledge about postsecondary education due to their parents’ lack of post-secondary experience and achievement.
**Lived Experience**

Individuals’ knowledge of the social world as they occur within such social contexts as postsecondary education, which Latino/as have shown little educational attainment related to their Latino/a first-generation college student status. These experiences can “reveal the connections between the social, cultural, and historical aspects of people’s lives” and allow researchers to better understand the phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 7).

**Resilience**

The ability to recover and overcome adversity (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Rutter, 1985). Some examples adversity examples are cancer, child abuse, mental health and poverty. The adversity addressed in this study is Latino first-generation college students identity.

**Educational Resilience**

The ability to overcome adversities to be academically successful (Wang & Gordon, 1994). Academically successful is defined in this study as persistence to college graduation.

**Persistence**

A college student’s continual matriculation at a college or university from one academic year to the subsequent (Rethlake, 2007; Tinto, 1987) and to eventual graduation is defined as persistence. The outcome of interest in this study is post-secondary persistence of Latino/a first-generation college students. In this study, persistence is based on Adelman’s (2005) conception of the word, which described that individuals
make proactive choices to secure opportunities within and offered by institutions in order to establish new interests and yield positive outcomes. This explanation of persistence holds that students determine their fate to achieve academic success. Persistence in this study, by using the elected definition, is appropriate for educational resilience which positions that overcoming adversity is rooted within students’ thoughts and behaviors.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is in its potential to affect the following three areas: 1) educational resilience research among Latino/a first-generation college students, 2) educational resilience research within post-secondary education, 3) Latino/a first-generation college student persistence. This study will have a bearing on the overall framework for which student persistence is examined. The research approach is important so as to explain and describe persistence from a larger multidimensional and dynamic perspective. Taken as a whole, the aim is for the research to convey that while risks are part of the Latino/a first-generation college student experience, risks can yield educational resilience.

Specifically, this study aims to enhance the study of Latino/a first-generation college students in regard to educational resilience, as research linking the two is predominantly absent within postsecondary education literature. Juxtaposing the two is valuable, for it could possibly reframe how researchers and policy makers examine and understand how Latino/a first-generation college students overcome risk and persistence to attain a post-secondary degree. Research regarding educational resilience is limited in postsecondary education; hence studies utilizing the phenomenon, such as this study, will
widen its usefulness in the field. Research using educational resilience is significant for postsecondary education because while it acknowledges adversities, the theory does not assume that risks result in negative outcomes. This offers an opportunity to meaningfully position risks not merely be considered a deficit, but a form of empowerment for students, such as Latino/a first-generation college students as they strive to achieve a postsecondary education degree. Bernard (2004) posited that all individuals are capable of resilience, but the traits they employ must be identified in order for people to utilize them and be successful. Thus, this research is significant for it also aims to describe the traits in relation to educational resilience. This research examines Latino/a first-generation college students from an entirely non-deficit perspective to understand their success. The research resolves to describe and rationalize that even though the characteristics that first-generation college students possess as they enter a post-secondary institution are complex, considering them deficits has a predominantly negative impact and should not be how they are benchmarked within these students’ post-secondary encounter. This is meaningful, for this study aims to examine Latino/a college students to understand how educational resilience operated during their tenure as a college student.

Next, this research is significant in that it is working to identify how non-cognitive factors contribute to these students’ college academic success. This study will contribute an understanding of how non-cognitive factors act in the lives of college students, to advance how postsecondary education might broaden its analysis of persistence by considering such factors. Findings from this study are necessary to
generate awareness and support for persistence analysis and to tailor examination in a direction that considers risk factors in persistence. In fact, the research attempts to provide an understanding of how non-cognitive factors are explored by examining if, for some students, these factors are sources of strengths rather than deficits. Essentially, this study is targeted at enhancing understanding of how non-cognitive characteristics contribute to Latino/a first-generation college student persistence, through the examination of an educational resilience framework. Understanding non-cognitive characteristics from an educational resilience framework advances that risks retained by Latino/a first-generation college students can be methods of support and conducive to their academic success.

This research is also important for educators because it incites them to signify risks as a form of empowerment and enablement. It is important for Latino/a first-generation college students to know, and often it is the institutions’ faculty and staff to impart on these students, that while they have striven to make, like all students they are capable of learning and making modifications. This is important because it is misleading to refer to segments of students’ identity as detrimental to their success. Instead, it is more balanced to recognize risks as inspirational factors for Latino/a first-generation college students’ postsecondary education experience. This will allow educators to maintain that while students will have struggles, educational failure is not a constant position.
Understanding Persistence - Student’s Perspective

The significance of the study is also that using an educational resilience framework allows for the opportunity to look at and gain descriptions of persistence from students’ perspectives. Currently, persistence models such as Tinto’s (1993) precondition the set of factors from which to analyze persistence. Tracey and Sedlacek (1986) posited that non-cognitive variables, such as positive self-concept or realistic self-appraisal were more related to graduation, while traditional measures, such as standardized test scores, were not. An educational resilience framework allows the student to describe how they approached persistence with a framework that does not require a pre-established set of factors. This allowed for a more integrative assessment of the persistence of Latino/a students.

Implications for this study are also that it examined persistence from a perspective in which Latino/as are aware that their first-generation college student characteristics are considered threats to them achieving a college degree. This research is helpful to identify the various ways individuals “negotiate risk factors and cope with stressors, across domains, developmental states, and contexts” (Margalit, 2003, p. 82). This study explored how some Latino/a first-generation college students viewed their risk factors, not as obstructions to them achieving a bachelor’s degree, but features they must consider and manage in order to persist. Attinasi and Tierney (as cited in Braxton et al., 1997) advanced that persistence studies need to move toward being “grounded in the experience of students themselves” (p. 150). This research attained descriptions of how these students responded to their characteristics, not from a view that they are at higher risk of
not attaining a degree, but as being self-aware that their particular background requires them to approach their persistence using specific non-cognitive and external sources. Thus, this study is significant because Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence is explored with the goal of unfolding the process directly from the population that is executing the action.

This study analyzes that, not unlike other college students, Latino/a first-generation college students enroll with certain characteristics, which requires them to address their persistence from a particular perspective. This is important, because while Tinto’s (1993) model acknowledged that particular characteristics influence these students’ post-secondary experiences, it did not provide an opportunity for students to illustrate how they persist with the attributes. Tierney (1999) asserted that Tinto’s (1993) theory overlooked the persistence of students of color. Specifically, Tierney (1992) faulted Tinto’s framework for suggesting that students of color must assimilate socially and academically into the cultural mainstream and disregard their ethnic identity to succeed on a predominately White campus. In response, the research positioned their ethnic identity in the forefront of persistence analysis, as a way to validate, and not discount, the trait within the process.

This research further contributes to educational resilience literature, for it expands the population or which the phenomenon is being applied. This research is significant for postsecondary education because the struggles of Latino/as in relation to postsecondary education have not improved over the years. In order to increase persistence, postsecondary education professionals must determine how to integrate at-
risk student groups into the culture of the institution (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Research on this population is in demand of new methodologies and frameworks to support Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence, and sustain this group to post-secondary graduation. Expanding the understanding of risk and Latino/a first-generation college students means redirecting the cycle for how persistence is examined.

**Study Organization**

In Chapter One, the study was introduced and relevant background information was provided to illustrate the relevance and purpose of the study. In Chapter Two, a review of literature on First-generation college students, Latino/a college students, resilience and educational resilience is presented. The aforementioned section provides a comprehensive description of the elected theoretical framework, and describes how the proposed study will expand research on Latino/a first-generation college students by describing how this group overcomes their adversities as first-generation college students to achieve educational resilience. Chapter Three provides detailed explanations about the research design, data analysis, and how the study will be performed. Chapter Four provides narratives about the 10 students profiled, within this dissertation, from the nineteen research participants. Next, Chapter Five describes the findings identified after data collection and analysis. Finally, Chapter Six presents the following: implications for practice, recommendations for future research implications, limitations and strengths and personal reflections.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section considers the association between Latino/a first-generation college students’ postsecondary persistence and their educational resilience. Understanding the connection between these two outcomes for Latino/a students is critical to our understanding of other related higher education challenges such as college access, participation due to academic preparation, affordability and ability (Santiago, Kienzi, Sponsier, & Bowles, 2010). The educational advancement of Latino/as is seen as critical when considering that this group is more likely to be first-generation than other undergraduates (Santiago et al., 2010). In a quest to improve higher education outcomes for Latino/a first-generation college students, it is important to contextualize and understand their persistence to graduation. Thus, study calls for persistence to be placed within an educational resilience’s framework, considering non-cognitive elements. The following section works to build a case for examining how non-cognitive characteristics influence Latino/a first-generation students’ educational resilience.

Justification for this research begins with background on first-generation college students, followed by data on Latino/as in higher education. To place educational resilience’s unique focus on non-cognitive factors, I described studies in higher education that demonstrate that internal factors do influence Latino/a persistence. History and background on resilience and educational resilience are then provided to demonstrate

29
how examining persistence by considering non-cognitive factors can enhance understanding of Latino/a’s experiences. Studies utilizing educational resilience as a framework are presented to impart what is currently understood about non-cognitive sources in relation to Latino/a student persistence, and what research needs to be developed. Finally, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Paradigm is presented as a lens to understand educational resilience and persistence, and how non-cognitive factors relate, connect and function within the various environments that students encounter.

U.S. culture affirms that attaining a postsecondary degree is achievable regardless of one’s background (Ishitani, 2003). However, research indicates that achieving a postsecondary degree is influenced by not only one’s willingness to apply and enroll in an institution, but also by parental postsecondary educational attainment (Lee, Sax, Kim, & Hagedorn, 2004). Haller and Portes (1973) stressed that “education, and to a lesser extent, occupational attainment, in turn are viewed as causally dependent on parental status” (p. 62). Parents with a college degree advance their children’s educational attainment in three keys areas: motivation to attend college, academic preparation for college, and application to a postsecondary institution (Johnson, 2004). For those students who do not have a least one parent with a baccalaureate degree (defined as first-generation college students), scholars have identified that they are less likely than non-first-generation college students to enroll in a postsecondary institution or attain a degree (Billson & Terry, 1982; Chen & Carroll, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2007). For first-generation college students, their parents’ educational achievement, and the qualities associated with
their background contributes to the framework from which they approach postsecondary educational experience (Hottinger & Rose, 2006).

Given that the defining attribute of the first-generation college student population is that neither parent has a baccalaureate degree, these students are likely to be at a disadvantage because their parents’ experiences and knowledge does not include higher education (Choy, 2001; Sewell & Shah, 1967). Expectations for earning a bachelor’s degree, or an advanced degree, increase in relation to their parents’ education:

…from 55 percent for those whose parents had no postsecondary education, to 71 percent for those whose parents had some college experience, to 91 percent for those whose parents had bachelor’s degrees or higher. (Choy, 2001, p. 10)

Specifically, first-generation college students are 40% less likely to pursue advanced education than their peers whose parents are college educated (Choy, 2001). In essence, first-generation college students do not have “the benefit of parental experience to guide them, either in preparing for college or in helping them understand what will be expected of them after they enroll” (Riehl, 1994, p. 15).

Over the years, research has consistently identified an association between parents’ educational attainment and a student’s postsecondary education experience and achievement (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). College students, at the turn of the 20th century, were predominately White male adolescents, and sons of prosperous professionals and farmers. But subsequent eras experienced a shift in the demographics of college-going populations whereby women, African Americans, Latino/as (London, 1992) and Asian Americans increased enrollment. The change reflected an increase in the number of students whose parents and grandparents did not finish high school and held
blue-collar jobs. These students are now known as first-generation college students (London, 1992). In 1971, first-generation college students comprised 38.5% of students, which decreased to around 19.2% in 1992 and to 15.9% by 2005 (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

**First-Generation College Students Pre-college Characteristics**

First-generation college students are a distinctive population in higher education because they are a subpopulation that is principally uninformed and unaware about what is required to enroll in higher education or succeed as a student (Davis, 2010). Prior to enrolling in a postsecondary institution, first-generation college students are found to have specific experiences that influence their success in pursuing and achieving an advanced degree. As twelfth graders, 53% of first-generation college students expect to achieve a postsecondary degree compared to 90% of their peers (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Choy, 2001). Parental support and encouragement significantly affects students’ aspirations to enroll in college (Hosseler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). In some situations, first-generation college students receive little to no encouragement to pursue a postsecondary degree (Billson & Terry, 1982; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Terenzini et al., 1996). This lack of support results from parents of first-generation college students having little knowledge or comfort level with higher education aspirations (Hsiao, 1992; Striplin, 1999). As a result, these students are challenged with completing college applications, obtaining, financial aid, and from receiving little support from family on their postsecondary aspirations (Thayer, 2000; Vargas, 2004). Parents of first-generation college students are often unaware of the social and economic benefits that a higher
education can offer (Vargas, 2004; Volle & Federico, 1997). Parents of first-generation college students also seldom solicit resources that will aid in their children’s educational advancement like use of the internet, parent-teacher interactions, and college information nights (Choy, 2001; Oliverez & Tierney, 2005; Tornatzky et al., 2002; Vargas, 2004).

In addition to parents’ educational levels and their lack of familiarity with higher education, research indicates that first-generation college students’ high school preparation could adversely influence their postsecondary admission and matriculation. Academic ability is critical to first-generation college students’ postsecondary enrollment and persistence (Shepherd, Schmidt, & Pugh, 1992). Yet, first-generation college students have been identified as having less developed high school academic skills than their peers (Choy, 2001; Inmann & Mayes, 1999), making it more difficult to successfully navigate a university curriculum (Choy 2001; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). One reason is that first-generation college students are more likely to attend high schools that do not offer college preparatory curriculum options or programs of study like advanced placement, honors, or international baccalaureate programs (Horn & Nunez, 2000). Choy (2001) found that 49% of first-generation college students received poor academic preparation in high school compared to 15% of their peers.

A rigorous curriculum is important to prepare students for the postsecondary admission process and success as postsecondary college students (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001). College admission requirements look favorably upon students who follow a college preparatory curriculum, but first-generation college students take advanced
courses in high school at a lower rate than peers (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Unfortunately, when given the opportunity, few first-generation college students enroll in college preparatory classes, (Chen & Caroll, 2005; Horn, 1992; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). First-generation college students not only take fewer advanced high school courses (Horn & Nunez, 2000) but also have lower high school GPAs than their peers (Riehl, 1994; Warburton et al. 2001). A college preparatory curriculum includes advanced placement (AP) courses, dual-credit college courses, advanced science and math classes such as physics, calculus, and statistics and three years of a foreign language. Advanced math courses, in particular, are strongly correlated with enrolling in a postsecondary institution (Adelman 1999; Choy, 2001; Horn & Nuñez, 2000; Riley 1997). Even for those first-generation students who took advanced math courses, Horn and Nunez (2000) found that they enroll in postsecondary institutions at a rate of 64%, 20% lower than their non-first-generation college student peers. These students also score lower on SAT or ACT exams than peers whose parents have an advanced degree (Riehl, 1994; Warburton et al., 2001). First-generation college students’ pre-college characteristics yield a postsecondary application process and academic experience that is challenging and filled with recurrent struggles.

**First-Generation College Students’ In-college Characteristics**

First-generation college students who enroll in institutions of higher education include large percentages of women, students of color, and non-traditional students (Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Hurtado, 2007; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). First-generation college students are the first in their family to pursue higher
education, thus they have limited access to information on the college admission process (Thayer, 2000; Vargas, 2004). Research concluded that while first-generation college students reported support from high school guidance counselors, their relatives and teachers had a more significant influence in their decision to enroll (Saenz, et al., 2007). Nevertheless, first-generation college students receive minimal assistance from parents while preparing for college or the application process, due to their limited knowledge (Choy, 2001). Despite the limited number of people who can provide insight on the process, first-generation college students enroll in postsecondary institutions. But they are less likely to be admitted to a four-year college than their second-generation student peers (Choy, 2001). In 2005, 54.7% of first-generation college students reported that a postsecondary institution’s academic status influenced their decision to apply to that institution (Saenz et al., 2005). However, even when qualified to enroll into selective institutions, first-generation college students predominantly enrolled in less selective two-year or four-year colleges and universities, or private, for-profit professional schools (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Pascarella et al. 2004; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Phillippe & Patton, 2000). Specifically, first-generation college students attend public two-year institutions at a rate of 44.0% compared to 34.8% of their peers. They attend public, four-year institutions at a rate of 29.7% compared to 37.2% of their peers. They also attend private, for-profit institutions at a rate of 10.7% compared to 3.4% of their peers (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

Once first-generation college students get into these institutions, some may have multiple risk factors to contend with, such as low critical thinking skills (Terenzini,
low degree aspirations, inefficient time management skills, decreased motivation, poor abstract and conceptual skills, low self-esteem and verbal passiveness (Billson & Terry, 1982; Bui, 2001; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Moore & Carpenter, 1985; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Thayer, 2000; Willett, 1989). The limited academic and cognitive skills are especially noteworthy considering that 33.4% of non-first-generation college students reported studying at least six or more times a week compared to 25.3% of first-generation college students (Saenz et al., 2007). These deficits have contributed to the struggles first-generation college students encounter as they work toward a postsecondary degree. For example, many first-generation college students enroll in remedial courses during their first semester, have lower college GPAs, repeat or withdraw from courses, complete fewer credit hours and academic courses, struggle to select a major and take smaller course loads than their peers (Billson & Terry, 1982; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001). Warbarton et al. (2001) found that after their first year at a postsecondary institution, first-generation college students had a 2.4 GPA, which was .3 points below their non-first-generation peers. Collectively these characteristics have resulted in first-generation college students completing degree requirements at lower rates (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamnin, 1998).

While first-generation college students’ academic dynamics place them at risk for lower performance and persistence (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora, 1996), being the first in their family to attend a postsecondary institution also influences their higher education experience outside the classroom. First-generation college students
typically negotiate academic and personal commitments in order to attain their degree.

First-generation college students enroll in higher education on a predominately part-time basis (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998), and are likely to work a part- or full-time job while completing their degree (Choy, 2001; Thayer, 2000). They also enroll in community college more often to be closer to home or live with family or relatives rather than peers (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). For first-generation college students, in comparison to their peers, financial responsibilities are more salient to their postsecondary experience. For some first-generation college students, the decision to enroll in postsecondary institutions is related to cost and fulfilling their obligations beyond school (Berkner & Chavez, 1997). Some first-generation college students live off-campus because they are married and must fulfill those responsibilities, while others do so because they rely on parents for financial support or are fulfilling other family obligations (Choy, 2001). First-generation college student characteristics require them to integrate into the college environment in ways not required of their peers (Billson-Terry, 1982; Davis, 2007).

**Significance of Race in Studies of First-Generation College Students**

Another way that first-generation college students are unique from their peers is in racial identity. Although researchers are cautious about applying the first-generation category as a proxy for ethnicity and race (Davis, 2010), there is research that indicates an association between these two characteristics. Engle and Tinto (2006) asserted that research on first-generation college students establishes that race and ethnicity are interrelated and independently connected to lower graduation rates. First-generation
college students who enrolled in higher education between 1992 and 2000 were less likely to be White, compared to Latinos and African American students (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). The connection between first-generation college characteristics and race/ethnicity is further supported considering that 86.8% of first-generation college students who entered four-year institutions for the first time in Fall 2005 were students of color (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007). In 1971, the national average for first-generation college students was 38.5%, but much higher among Latino/as (69.6%), African Americans (62.9%), Native Americans (44.8%) and Asian Americans (42.5%) (Saenz et al., 2007). In 2005, first-generation college student numbers fell to 15.9%, a decline identified in both public and private schools (Saenz et al., 2007). Specifically, in private schools, their numbers went from 30.4% in 1971 to 12.8% in 2005. Also, first-generation college students are more likely to live in homes where a language other than English was spoken (16% versus 7%) (Warburton et al., 2001). Somers (2004) asserted that there are reasons which unite first-generation college students and students of color, and making these links could aid regions of the country that predominately educate minority first-generation college students.

The link between ethnicity and first-generation college status is especially significant for Latino/as. In 2005, while the number of first-generation college students within each racial group declined, Latino/a students remained the ethnic group with the highest first-generation college student status at 38.3% (Saenz et al., 2007). As described below, increasing postsecondary degree attainment is particularly imperative for Latino/a students because the Latino/a population is increasing significantly in proportion to the
general U.S. population. Yet, we observe no corresponding increase in their educational attainment. Considering findings that show that a significant number of first-generation college students are Latino/a, and data describing their low rates of educational advancement, Latino/as are positioned to be an ethnic group that is undereducated and limited in individual, familial and intergenerational social mobility.

**Latino/as’ U.S. Population and Postsecondary Enrollment**

In 2008, the Latino/a population reached 46.9 million, a 3.2% increase from 2007 (U.S. Census, 2008). Latino/as comprise 14.8% of the 299 million U.S. inhabitants, and have a 24.3% growth rate, which is four-times more than the general population growth rate (U.S. Census, 2006). Furthermore, 44% of U.S. children under the age of 18 are from a minority group, and 34% of Latino/as are under the age of 18 (U.S. Census, 2010). The increase in the Latino/a population and growth rate are significant because their population’s growth is expected to impact U.S. postsecondary education.

By the year 2020, Latino/a students are expected to increase their postsecondary enrollment to 46%, a rate higher than any other U.S. ethnic group (NCES, 2002). However, Latino/as also yield the highest dropout rate of the four major ethnic groups at the postsecondary level, with an 18.3% rate in contrast with African Americans, Asians, and Whites at 9.9%, 4.4%, and 4.8% respectively (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010). These figures provide a critical context for the importance of the proposed research to examine Latino/as in higher education. Latino/as, in addition to Asians, was the group that most increased in undergraduate enrollment between 1976 and 2008. The rates for Latino/as increased from 4% to 13%, while for Asians the increase was from 2%
to 7%, and 10% to 14% for African Americans, while Whites experienced a decline from 82% to 62% (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010).

Despite increases in postsecondary enrollment, Latino/as remain the group least likely to attain a postsecondary degree. In 2008, 13% of Latino/as achieved a postsecondary degree, compared to 20% of African Americans, 52% of Asians and 33% of Whites (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). These figures emphasize the need to research how a segment of the Latino/a population is able to persevere (despite their risk factors) towards a postsecondary degree.

Latino/a students who remain in the postsecondary environment should be studied to gain an understanding of the ways they are able to successfully navigate higher education and prevail. Resilient Latino/a first-generation college students may offer insights and knowledge about how to increase the retention and persistence of their Latino/a peers. Gaining a greater understanding of how first-generation Latino/a students can educationally triumph is crucial because as the figures showed, this population’s educational mobility is static. Understanding the struggles of first-generation Latino/a students within higher education requires situating their experience in the context of their parents’ educational background, as a majority of their struggles are interrelated to the parental relationship.

When looking at parents’ education, research identified that 11% of Latino/a mothers and 17% of African American mothers hold a bachelor’s degree, which are rates lower than Whites (36%) and Asians (51%) (Twigg, 2005). In fact, Latino/as are considered most disadvantaged because of parent educational level (Kao & Thompson,
Thus, when considering the impact of a parent’s educational achievements, it is reasonable to comprehend why Latino/a first-generation college students are considered highly unlikely to achieve a postsecondary degree. In fact, 33% of Whites and 26% of Asian American students leave postsecondary institutions without achieving a degree, while 45% of African Americans and 39% of Latino/as will exit without a degree (Twigg, 2005). When considering Latino/a first-generation students and their rates of degree attainment, the importance of efforts to increase this group’s persistence emerges to the forefront.

Latino/a Educational Pipeline – Secondary and Higher Education

Achieving a postsecondary degree is frequently encouraged in order to secure a life in the U.S. that will produce economic rewards and social mobility. As mentioned in Chapter One, while Latino/as are the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, they lag behind other ethnic groups in secondary and postsecondary academic achievement. Latino/a population growth and their scarce achievement of higher education degrees combined present serious implications for the postsecondary system. In the near future, an important distinction among Latino/as within the nation’s workforce will be among those who participate in the workforce plus or minus a college degree. The proportion of Latino/as with a higher education degree is considerably lower than other major ethnic groups. Therefore, increasing Latino/as’ postsecondary degree attainment is necessary not only for the population’s advancement, but the nation’s future. As higher education looks forward, an important role and responsibility will be to ensure that Latino/as who attempt to secure a college degree do achieve this goal.
Latino/as in Secondary Education

In order to understand the experience of Latino/as at the higher education level it is important to recognize and acknowledge this population’s educational attainment and statistics at the secondary level. For the past few decades, the United States dropout rate for high school students has remained around 30%, but the Latino/a student dropout rate has exceeded 40% (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Rodriguez, 2008; Swanson, 2004). Research indicates that Latino/as have a greater dropout rate than African Americans and Whites. In fact, 41% of Latino/as age 20 and older do not have a high school diploma, in comparison to 23% of African Americans, 14% of Whites, and 15% of Asians within the same comparison group (Fry, 2010).

The Latino/a dropout rate becomes especially alarming when considering that Latino/as have the highest dropout rate of the major ethnic groups, and as described earlier, their population rate is expeditiously increasing. The U.S. Census Bureau (2006) projected that the number of Latino/a school-aged children will significantly grow and impact secondary school enrollment for decades to come. In fact, by 2050 a 166% increase is projected, equaling an increase of 11 million in 2006 to 28 million in 2050. During this time, school-aged children from other ethnic groups are expected to grow from 43 million to 45 million. By 2050, U.S. public schools anticipate a Latino/a school-age population that outnumbers White children at all secondary school levels (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Thus, as higher education institutions project their future populations, they should be concerned about Latino/as in their educational communities, as well as for those that do not enroll in their institutions.
Latino/as in Higher Education

In 2010, the number of Latino/as attending U.S. colleges hit a record high of a 24% enrollment rate (Pew, 2011). Latino/as made up 15% of the 12.2 million college age students in two- or four-year colleges. These record setting numbers are the result of both a population growth and educational strides (Pew, 2011). While these figures are reassuring in that Latino/as are making great strides in their enrollment into postsecondary institutions, they continue to indicate that Latino/as are the least college educated among the major ethnic groups. In fact, in the same year of 2010, only 13% of Latino/as completed a bachelor’s degree, in comparison to 53% of Asians, 39% of Whites and 19% of African Americans (Pew, 2011). The need to address Latino/a educational achievement is supported by a sustained pattern of low achievement in higher education.

Despite Latino/as academically trailing other ethnic groups in attaining postsecondary degrees, they are a group driven to enroll and achieve a higher education degree. The year 2008 saw an increase of Latino/as enrolled in universities to 25.8%, which was a 4.1% increase from 2000, 5.1% from 1990 and 9.8% from 1980 (NCES, 2010). Further, Latino/a college completion rates increased from 9% to 11% between 1975 and 2005 (Gandara, 2005). Although Latino/as’ minimal educational accomplishments position this group to be exceedingly undereducated, resulting in their social and economic struggle, those enrolling demand that educators and researchers expand their understanding of those who do achieve a degree. This is especially important when considering the Latino/a population increased by 43% between 2000 and
2010, which is four times the growth of total population growth (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). This positions that Latino/as’ educational attainment should not be overlooked, but rather carefully considered.

Measures of persistence and degree attainment for Latino/as in higher education portray them as a group that will not reap the benefits of college education. Research identifies that 13% of Latino/as over the age of 25 have achieved a bachelor’s degree, in comparison to 33% of Whites, 52% of Asian Americans, and 20% of African Americans (Aud, Fox, KewalRamani, 2010). Further, at the graduate level, Latino/as’ educational achievement figures are even lower. In 2000, Latino/as earned 7% of master’s degrees and 4% of doctoral degrees (NCES, 2012). Latino/as have the lowest level of educational attainment of all major ethnic groups, with the exception of specific higher education or associates degree, which they earn at similar rates to African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). In fact, after leaving high school, less than one quarter (23.2%) of Latino/as will graduate with a four-year degree in comparison to 47.3% of non-Latino/a students (Swail et al., 2004). Latino/as are a group who fall out of the educational pipeline in college. Of the 61% of Latino/as that complete high school, and of those who enroll in college, only 13% accomplished a bachelor’s degree (Ryan & Siebens, 2009).

Hernandez and Lopez (2004) asserted that “Latino students, not unlike other students, experience college in multiple ways and their decision to sustain their college enrollment is influenced and shaped by a variety of factors” (p. 54). Thus, while considering their enrollment characteristics and outcomes described above, it is also important to comprehensively look at all potential factors that influence Latino/a first-
generation college students' persistence. One of those approaches is to examine students' non-cognitive attributes, such as pre-college characteristics, goals and commitments and institutional experiences, as they are considered influential on students' academic achievement and retention (Braxton, 2000; Braxton & McClendon, 2002; Lotkowoksi et al., 2004; Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab, & Lynch, 2003; Robbins, Allen, Casillas, Peterson & Le, 2006). Further, non-cognitive elements, jointly with cognitive factors, produce a greater understanding of student departure (Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1997) and success.

**Latino/a Research within Higher Education and Non-cognitive Factors**

Studies in this section described how non-cognitive features such as motivation to succeed, strong work ethic, positive self-understanding and/or validation have an effect on Latino/a student persistence. These studies indicated that beyond parent socio-economic characteristics and finances, non-cognitive factors influence Latino/a student persistence. The studies confirmed the gap that the proposed research aims to fill, which is while non-cognitive factors have been identified as affecting Latino/a perseverance, descriptions are needed about just how non-cognitive factors contribute to their ability to overcome risks. Thus, exploring non-cognitive factors are essential to provide a context for understanding how persistence is multidimensional process. More importantly, for Latino/a students, non-cognitive factors are useful in explaining how they persist to achieve a college degree. Thus, research on non-cognitive elements is especially important considering Latino/a enrollment and graduation rates.
Self-efficacy

Perceived self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura’s (1999) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), is a set of internal beliefs, connected to their emotional stimulation or thinking patterns. Self-efficacy viewpoints are constructed from social or environmental contributions, behavioral attempts with appropriate feedback and personal factors such as motivation, ability, interest and beliefs (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1999) described that self-efficacy beliefs influence people in various ways, for individuals have the power to enact human agency by being self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating. In an academic setting, self-efficacy has been related to managing stress, task performance, adjustment, grade outcomes and setting academic objectives. Bandura (1999) advanced that efficacy attitudes are used to determine what goals to undertake, effort to invest, and time to dedicate to preserve and overcome challenges.

Latino/as and self-efficacy. In Strage’s (1999) study which examined college student adjustment and success, among Latino/a, White, and Asian American students, the author uncovered similarities and dissimilarities as a function of ethnicity and family educational background, and information about Latino/as and self-efficacy. Survey results about perception of family experiences and their attitudes related to academic confidence, and persistence with difficult tasks and academic task focus revealed that despite being first-generation college students, Latino/as had high scores in task involvement, confidence and persistence. Specifically, Strage (1999) stated that these Latino/a students were persistent and confident despite their low grades, and they maintained confidence, task focus, and desire to persist. Strage (1999) suggested that
self-efficacy beliefs may have functioned to allow these Latino/a students to stimulate confidence in their academic tasks, and drive to concentrate and persist through challenges.

Using a naturalist framework, Hernandez (2000) explored how Latino/a’s college experiences and environmental factors contributed to their persistence. This qualitative study approached Latino/a student persistence, by exploring the factors (and their meaning) that influenced these students’ retention and graduation. Through in-depth interviews, this study of 10 Latino/a students determined that these students’ beliefs in their success and positive mental outlook on their potential allowed them academically continue. Latino/a students were resilient when they had a positive outlook about their desire to succeed.

Phinney and Haas (2003) and Dennis, Phinney, and Chauteco (2005) also found that student motivation to attend college and be successful led students to work to adjust to college and accomplish their academic responsibilities. Phinney and Haas’ (2003) mixed-method study of 30 Asian, African American, biracial, but mostly Latino/a first-year students examined how these students coped with stress, despite risks related to their first-generation status to academically persevere. Results showed that these students had a sense of commitment to attaining their degree and a strong self-efficacy about being successful, which enabled them to function with focus and determination. Students’ self-efficacy was strongly correlated (.46) with their constructive coping with academic pressures.
Also in a quantitative study, Dennis et al. (2005) investigated the ways in which motivational characteristics and environmental supports contributed to the academic outcomes of 84 Latino/a and 16 Asian first-generation college students. Utilizing an ecological framework to consider aspects of self and environment to identify what counteracts the academic risk factors these students tackle, the study showed that students adjusted and continued because their motivation to attend college was grounded in a desire to attain a rewarding career. This factor was more strongly related to college outcomes than family expectations.

Collectively, these findings support the importance of considering how inner ambition helps Latino/as cope with being first in their family to attend a postsecondary institution.

Social Cognitive Theory and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1999) are important considerations among Latino/a students, as they are ways to explore the impact of belief systems on academic outcomes. Thus, this study inquires about students’ motivations and beliefs in order to understand the influence of self-efficacy on Latino/a first generation college students’ educational resilience. Findings from this research will aid in providing further interpretations about self-efficacy’s function in the persistence process.

Parents

Research identifies parental involvement as a powerful source for college persistence (Auerbach, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Gandara, 1995; Nora, Rendon, & Cuadraz, 1999; Perna & Titus, 2005; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005). Nora, Rendon, and Cuadraz (1999) imparted that parents instill the idea that achieving and persevering
despite adversity is possible. Such an approach instills internal strength and establishes a basis for students’ educational aspirations and the expectations they establish for themselves.

For example, in a study of Latino/as’ perceptions of parental support, Ceja (2004) examined high school students’ interpretation of their parents’ lived experiences, and the non-conventional, direct and indirect manners in which parents conveyed messages of educational resiliency and aspirations. Specifically, parents’ confidence in their children’s’ social mobility (despite their own limitations) were causes for strength in their students’ desire to academically persist (Ceja, 2004). The findings revealed that based on their parents’ experiences, Latino/a students established a matter-of-fact awareness of their circumstance, which provided them the space to cope, survive, and be successful (Ceja, 2004). In another study by Sanchez, Reyes, and Singh (2006) the researchers identified that those who identified as Mexican American found family to be most important factor in their educational attainment, even though parents may lack knowledge about educational systems, or have low English proficiency and/or educational attainment. The reason is that parents offered other types of support, such as cognitive guidance/advice, role modeling and emotional and realistic support. For these Latino/a students, their parents’ struggles, wisdom, work ethic motivated them, and were particularly relevant to their persistence.

**Outstanding Work Ethic**

Latino/a first-generation college students also applied a “profound work ethic” (Gandara, 1999, p. 185) derived from their parents’ encouragement and role modeled
positive work ethic, which positively affected their drive to attain a college degree. A qualitative study examined 50 Mexican Americans, who attained a M.D., J.D., or Ph.D., despite being considered at-risk of not completing degrees because of their background and precarious life events (Gandara, 1982). Applying a perspective that centered on identifying factors that contributed to these students’ extraordinary educational attainment, the study examined men and women. However, the findings primarily correlated to women. More than verbal exchange, the participants held that witnessing their parent’s hard-working behavior set the standard for them striving for excellence in educational environments and beyond (Gandara, 1982). While these students attended integrated high schools, which contributed to their academic ambition, so too did their relationship with and reflection upon the experiences of their parents, specifically mothers. Particularly, the findings maintained that family relationships in the form of role modeling allowed Latino/as to cultivate an internal philosophy (like work ethic) to persist.

**Positive Self-understanding**

Relationships also positively affect students’ understanding of self in an educational context. A study examining how race and gender shape Latino/as’ college success explicitly found relationships helped individuals establish a positive sense of self (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). This qualitative study interviewed 27 high school mentees and 56 college student mentors in a college bridge program examined successful Latino/a students and challenged the notion that they achieved academic success through assimilation. The study found that Latinas who mentored high school students, and
reflected and discussed their ability to achieve academic success, developed a positive self-understanding. The women held that in the face of such threats as racial discrimination, prejudice and derogatory stereotypes, mentoring helped them maintain optimistic self-descriptions and self-judgments. Scholars concluded that Latinas’ educational drive did not require that they abandon their ethnic identity, but rather maintain a positive ethnic identity. This meant forming trustworthy relations with other Latino/as, and feeling safe in their surroundings. In connection to the proposed study, this research is an impetus for exploring how a student’s ethnic awareness and self-efficacy helps them overcome hardships and persist.

**Cultural Benefits**

The benefits of connecting and living between two cultures were found to be advantageous for Latino/as. For example, in Feliciano’s (2001) study of Asian and Latino/a youth, those who retained cultural connections were less likely to drop out and performed better in school. This is in comparison to those youth who spoke only English and assimilated in U.S. culture. Other researchers asserted that immigrant culture can be an asset, and assimilation may lead to school achievement decline (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

Kao and Tienda (1995) identified that minority youth with immigrant parents did better academically than those with native-born parents. Suarez- Orozco and colleagues (2008), on the other hand, found that U.S.-born children of immigrants were not achieving educationally and lacked the motivation to succeed when compared to foreign-born students. Multiple researchers agreed that how a dominant culture reacts to diversity
sets the foundation for biculturalism within individuals or groups (Feliciano, 2001; Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008; Torres & Rollock, 2008). Thus, as Latino/a first-generation college students are examined, this research identified how this population internalizes ethnic pride to achieve educational resilience and persist.

**Ethnic Pride Connections**

Creating a safe place to share ethnic or cultural pride was also found to contribute positively to Latino/a students’ academic endeavors. In a study aimed at constructing a theory of minority student college departure using theoretical perspectives as an alternative to Tinto’s theory, Gonzalez (2000) asked two questions:

1). How do Chicano students experience their university environment? In particular, what meanings do they construct of their university experience during their first two years? 2). How do Chicano students negotiate their university experiences as they persist toward graduation? (p. 71)

The study identified that the students felt marginalized in three arenas: social (the racial and ethnic structure of people and groups), physical (architectural and visual campus spaces) and epistemological (knowledge known and exchanged). The students coped by instituting behaviors that outwardly and inwardly demonstrated Latino/a cultural pride. For example, absence of Latino/a music and images on campus led to loudly playing songs and displaying the Mexican flag and Latino/a icon posters in their residence hall room. The students’ actions served as a form of cultural sustenance to create synthesis between their culture and the university’s culture. These findings displayed that at times, Latino/a students are proactive in integrating their culture into the campus climate to sustain their drive to socially and academically persist. The conclusions confirmed that Latino/a culture provides them with a kind of validation to
persist, but research must increase accounts of how it facilitates their ability to overcome struggles, and helps them continue.

**Faculty-Student Interactions**

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature on faculty-student interactions, and established that student contact with faculty fostered student persistence, educational aspirations and degree completion. Research found that faculty-student interactions, especially among students of color, are significant in such measures as college satisfaction, and cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes for all students (Astin, 1993; Hernandez, 2000; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rendón, 1994; Tinto 1993). Chang (2005) reasoned that faculty are compelling influences because they hold multiple roles within institutions such as instructors, employers, advisors and overall role models who are sources of support and guidance. Astin and Astin (2000) stressed that faculty, given their institutional roles, are powerful resources in developing college students.

However, research indicates that faculty-student relationships do not develop effortlessly, nor do they occur regularly or are fulfilling for underrepresented students (Anaya & Cole, 2003: Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). Faculty exert power over and contribute to students’ self-worth, which may cause low-income or students of color to internalize being academically underprepared and therefore feel marginalized and unworthy of faculty (Laden, 2004). Research identified that among Latino/a postsecondary college students who hold such sentiments, these feelings of unpreparedness and marginalization negatively influences their persistence because it
hinders engagement in advantageous faculty-student interactions. This includes pairing with faculty to conduct research or to be mentored (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). Given these findings, it is important to look at how faculty validation among Latino/as positively influences their persistence to achieve a postsecondary degree.

**Validation**

Validation was influential for minority students who arrived on campus expecting to fail, but instead persisted because individuals within their environment academically or internally reinforced them (Rendon, 1993). These conclusions were found in a qualitative study of 132 first-year and commuting African American and Latino/a students at four institutions across the U.S. The purpose of the study was to identify how student engagement in academic and non-academic experiences affects student learning. The researchers also explored how students’ external class experiences, specifically their interpersonal interactions, strengthened enriched, or diminished academic learning and intention to reach bigger educational objectives. Rendon (1993) identified that while some students were able to easily function socially and academically, some required the development of self-affirmation to establish a positive outlook within the academic environment. Validation from faculty who were approachable, treated students equally, and provided extra help were found to be especially effective. Also, outside the classroom, validation was derived as students witnessed faculty confidence in front of the classroom, parents asserting educational value, or having peers who they could talk with or from whom they could attain forms of
academic or emotional support. Investigating validation among Latino/a students within this study is important because it shows how external support builds internal esteem to overcome challenges.

Rendon’s (1993) study challenged the idea that the key to a successful college experience is in student-initiated involvement. The findings also confirmed that students in this study were successful because someone approached them, took an interest in them, and supported their endeavors. The students that overcame severe doubts about their academic ability were able to move on academically and beyond their low self-efficacy and esteem because others had reached out to them. Perseverance for these students required being validated rather than involved, which in turn allowed the community and others to build these students’ sense of well-being within the college environment.

Financial Aid

The price of attending a postsecondary institution is a major factor in the decision of where to attend for a college-bound student (Hurtado, Inkelas, St. John, Paulsen, & Starkey, 1996). The financing, especially for Latino/as, is a major factor in the lack of student persistence (Munoz, 1986; Nora, Rendon, & Cuadraz, 1999; Vasquez, 1997). The reason is that financial considerations shape judgments about attending postsecondary institutions, level of educational attainment, and college choice. St. John, Cabrera, Nora and Asker (2000) reported that financial issues expounded nearly half the total variance in persistence. Over the past four decades, the burden of postsecondary college cost has predominately transferred to students and their families (Mumper, 1996). Essentially, as costs increase, the purchasing power of free federal aid decreases, and student debt
increases.

Since the 1980s, student financial aid packages have become increasingly composed of loans and less of federal and state grants (Leslie & Brinkman, 1986). Family contributions towards college costs have risen most for low-income families, most of whom are Latino/a (Flores, 1994). Latino/a students rely more on scholarships, work-study funds, and loans for financing their education than the non-minority populations who receive more parental assistance (Vasquez, 1997). Also, those students who receive sufficient external and campus-based financial aid are more likely to enroll in more semesters, earn more class credit hours, attain high GPAs, and graduate (Nora, Rendon, & Cuadraz, 1999).

However, Latino/as can be reluctant to secure loans because they increase family debt. Taking the before-mentioned into account, Vasquez (1997) found that Latino/as therefore rely on scholarships and grants, which are shown to increase persistence over loans. In terms of considering financial aid with education, more research about how students internalize borrowing and loans to persist is needed. Thus, this study aims to identify how securing loans are positively internalized, if at all.

**Summary**

This body of literature indicated that Latino/a students continue to persist within higher education using or developing non-cognitive resources. The studies reviewed illustrated that Latino/a students’ persistence to graduation is influenced by a dynamic array of factors. Departing from Tinto’s (1975; 1987; 1993) persistence framework, these studies recognized that perseverance is affected by non-cognitive factors that are engaged
within and beyond the university context. In fact, some of the factors relate to behaviors that Tinto (1975; 1987; 1993) cautioned against (e.g., cultural connections, family interconnectedness) when facilitating academic success.

Some scholars asserted that a better understanding of Latino/a students requires examining and understanding those Latino/as that overcome risk factors and are academically successful (Dennis, et al., 2005; Gandara 1982; Hernandez, 2000; Phinney & Haas, 2003). The preceding body of literature on Latino/a students provides a framework of analysis of non-cognitive factors related to these students’ perseverance to attain a postsecondary degree. However, this research was limited in theorizing how non-cognitive factors contribute to students’ educational resilience and did not fully address Latino/a students’ persistence in the context of overcoming their risk factors. Specifically, the research does not examine Latino/as within the framework of educational resilience, in that it does not precisely isolate first-generation status as a risk factor. However, it might be helpful to do so, given that the findings described that Latino/as overcame challenges linked to their first-generation characteristics such as stress related to being first in their family, uninformed academic work requirements, racial/stereotype threats, limited cultural diversity on campus and uncertainties about academic skills. Thus, examining all non-cognitive factors identified in the literature in one study is necessary to provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding how students persist.

In response, the proposed study aims to classify all risk factors related to first-generation status, and assess how, if at all, non-cognitive factors positively help students
achieve educational resilience. Research on these factors is also important because it has the potential to further describe how the identified non-cognitive factors occur throughout a four-year college experience. Such research is needed to reveal that Latino/a students intentionally rather than unintentionally utilize non-cognitive factors. The research here is needed to broadly support that non-cognitive factors have an effect on the college experience. This is particularly important, because the limited descriptions on non-cognitive factors minimize their significance in students’ resiliency, specifically their educational resilience.

Resilience

Background on Resilience as a Construct

During the 1970s, researchers in psychology began to examine the resilience of pre-adolescent children who had positive life outcomes, despite living within significant personal and social adversity (Masten, 2001). This represented a change from investigating at-risk children from a deficit perspective to investigating why and how some children with mental or social adversities mature into healthy functioning adults. The shift produced research that assumed two preconditions: a) overcoming assaults on the developmental process, and b) experiencing major risks or serious hardships (Garmezy, 1990; Luthar & Zigler, 1999; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). Resilience research within psychology served as the foundation for future research grounded in individuals overcoming hardships, with adversities contextually established.
Resilience research in psychology also cultivated resilience research within the education field, which is the focus of the ensuing literature review. Specifically, this review explains the co-existing definitions of resilience, and descriptions of resilience as an *innate aptitude* (i.e., personality trait) or *external influence/support* (i.e., positive influences and support). Also, an overview of the psychological studies examining resilience within children is illustrated. Next, educational resilience among secondary students is reviewed. Finally, empirical studies on the educational resilience of Latino/a postsecondary first-generation college students are expounded to support this study’s purpose.

**Resilience Background**

Resilience is structured multidimensionally with no common definition, and inconsistencies about how the phenomenon is accomplished. This section clarifies the various definitions from which researchers examine resilience, and outlines the classification to be used in this study. Also, resilience as an *innate aptitude* and/or *external influence/support* is presented to provide context for the modes through which resilience occurs.

**Resilience Definition**

Although resilience has no universal definition, descriptions generally posit that resilience signifies positively overcoming risks (Barlelt, 1994). Research exploring definitions of resilience describe it as: a method of, ability to, or the outcome of efficaciously acclimating despite challenging and threatening circumstances (Garmazy & Masten, 1991); positively adjusting regardless of danger or challenges (Masten, 1994);
and triumphing over risk or adversity furthermore exceeding expectations (Richman & Fraser, 2001). These various definitions consistently indicate that an individual encounters or experiences adversity and prevails. For the purpose of this study, Luther, Cicchetti and Becker’s (2000) resilience definition is utilized, to describe the phenomenon as a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity.

contained within these definitions, is adversity, which differs depending on the circumstances being examined. Resilience is examined by first establishing an adversity, and then moving to examine how individuals overcome the specified hardship. Such a course of research is displayed in various fields by investigating such adversity as: socioeconomic difficulty and threat (Garmezy, 1991, 1995; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992), parental mental illness (Masten, & Coatsworth, 1995, 1998), abuse (Beeghly & Cicchetti, 1994; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1997; Cicchetti, Rogosch, Lunch, & Holt, 1993; Moran & Eckenrode, 1992), urban poverty and community violence (Luthar, 1999; Richters & Martinez, 1993), persistent illness (Wells & Schwebel, 1987), and tragic life events (O’Dougherty-Wright, Masten, Northwoord, & Hubbard, 1997). In this proposed study, the characteristics of being a first-generation, Latino/a college student are the focus of the adversity.

Researchers have also conceptualized resilience as occurring from an outcome (innate aptitude) and/or process (external influences/supports) approach (Block, 1980; Egelan, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993; McCubbin, 2001; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003). As described below and corroborated by empirical findings,
resilience has not been established as occurring through one primary or predominate method. For the purpose of this study resilience is referred to as emerging via *innate aptitude* and/or *external influence/support*. This section describes how resilience as an innate ability and/or through external influences/supports has been found to emerge within individuals and results in their triumph over adversity.

**Resilience Outcome (Innate Aptitude) or Process (External Influences/Supports)**

Research on resilience as an innate ability described the phenomena as a result of individuals’ positive intuitive mental wellness, social competency or capacity (Block, 1980; Olsson, et al. 2003). Masten (1995) stated that resilience occurred because individuals are competent at successfully adapting and functioning to and within their environments. Research identified resilient young adults who are so because they functioned well within high stress situations (Luthar, 1991) and have a higher tolerance for stress when compared to some peers (Luthar, 1991, 1993; Luthar, Doernberger, & Zigler, 1993). Olsson et al. (2003) advocated that focusing on resilience as an “outcome of adaptation to adversity constitutes an important and useful way of operationalizing the construct” (p. 3). Researchers suggested that resilience is innate and that individuals’ exercise of resilience is an extension of their identity. Examining resilience as an innate characteristic indicates that for some individuals, triumphing over adversity requires internal strength and motivation. Thus, gaining descriptions of the inner proficiencies that Latino/a students exercise to execute resilience is important to identify how they function in accomplishing successful outcomes or ambitions for themselves.
In comparison, “process focused [resilience] research aims to understand the mechanisms or processes that act to modify the impact of a risk setting, and the developmental process by which young people successfully adapt” (Egelan, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993, p. 3). Rutter (1987, 1999) posited that recognizing resilience as a process positions researchers to assess threat systems, consider a child’s or family’s characteristics and the characteristics of the larger social society (Masten & Garmezy, 1983; Werner & Smith, 1982; 1992) that cause risks in order to identify the protective factors that compel resilience.

As mentioned above, findings from empirical studies support examining resilience as both an innate aptitude and/or external influence/support. Findings from pioneering studies, secondary education and postsecondary student studies on resilience affirm that individuals vary their execution of resilience. Thus, no absolute execution of resilience has been identified. This point of contention confirms Olsson et al.’s (2003) position about the importance of identifying “the interaction of risk and protective process, and [emphasis added] resultant adaptive outcomes,” in order to better evaluate resilience (p. 9). Olsson et al.’s (2003) study justifies the proposed project’s focus on the resources that at-risk individuals access to promote their resilience in addition to the innate traits they activate to protect themselves against adversity. In other words, it speaks to the importance of examining the internal and external resources that at-risk individuals call upon when facing adversity.
**Foundational Resilience Studies**

An examination of the pioneering studies established that resilience occurred as a result of an innate capacity and/or external influence/support, and specifically identified that the individual, external family, and environments aid in yielding resilience. These foundational studies on resilience examined children and showed that they successfully overcame their adversity and emerged into healthy adults. The empirical studies below affirmed that children are capable of resilience, and acknowledged that resilience continues to be present and evolve as children transition into adulthood. Pioneering resilience studies also established that multiple layers of individuals’ lives are significant to constructing and examining resilience. The pioneering works of Rutter (1979), Werner and Smith (1977) and Garmezy, Masten and Tellez (1984) are expounded in this section and indicate that various internal and external resources are employed by children to support them in attaining resilience. These studies denoted that resilience is active in various aspects of an individual’s life.

Foundational resilience studies categorized resilience as a function within the following three conditions: a) trauma recovery, b) individuals from at-risk groups who achieve outcomes not expected, and c) individuals who positively adapt despite distressing experiences (Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990). These early resilience studies predominantly examined children whose adversity was having mothers with diagnosed schizophrenia (Garmezy, 1974; Garmezy & Streitman, 1974; Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1979). Rutter’s (1979) study examined resilience within the context of trauma recovery by studying children from the Island of Wright over a 10-year period,
whose parents were diagnosed as mentally ill. The study revealed that despite their mothers’ mental health, children were able to develop as mentally capable adults. Achieving resilience (i.e., good mental health) for these children was the result of their instinctive abilities, personal characteristics or school environments.

Resilience has also been identified as being a skill that can be nurtured. Werner and Smith (1977) conducted a study on children living on the Island of Kauai, born into families permeated with adversities such as poverty, parental mental illness and stress, family instability and conflict. As a result of these adversities, these children were expected to mature into adults with mental and social difficulties. Instead, findings identified that of the 201 children examined, one third of them were resilient, and reared into confident, capable and compassionate adults. The children avoided developing mental or social skill difficulties because of their natural demeanor, their ability to maintain loving family connections and/or establishing positive relationships with people in their community.

Beyond family or personal environments, educational environments are identified as developing resilience within children. Garmezy, Masten and Tellez (1984) studied resilience among children attending an elementary school. For over 10 years, 200 hundred children whose families had poverty and mental health hardships were examined. The findings established that the school environment helped the children grow into mentally, emotionally and socially thriving adults. Garmezy et al. (1984) determined that the children achieved resilience because their schools provided them with support from teachers, mentorship, and environmental stability. These supports helped the
children build character and instill within them the confidence to overcome their adversities. These foundational studies provide evidence that children with adversities are resilient in multiple environments, for instance, in home or at school.

The foundational studies also suggested that for at-risk individuals to achieve resilience, they must utilize internal and external resources. These foundational studies corroborate examining resilience from an educational perspective. For Latino/a postsecondary students, their adversities could contribute to educational failure because of their personal or social characteristics (i.e. race/ethnicity, parent’s educational achievement or class level). However, foundational resilience studies resolved that children exposed to personal or social risks could triumph over those factors. Rutter (1979), Werner and Smith (1977), and Garmezy et al’s (1984) work connects to the research questions in that they impart that at-risk students’ background, environment, or adversities do not automatically result in educational failure.

For example, Rutter (1979) identified that school environments provide protective factors that foster resilience. Rutter’s (1979) research framed resilience from internal, external, and systematic perspectives and established that although parents are essential to their children’s development, external relationships and environments are also significant. Rutter (1979) posited that educational systems have human resources beyond students’ families that serve as educational and emotional supports in the absence of families. These external supports cultivated goals that schools had for their students, which included growing into a competent adult, achieving academic excellence or knowing how to establish social connections. Despite students in Rutter’s (1979) study
having little or minimal support at home to cultivate educational expectations, protective factors within the school environment safeguarded students from failing or yielding negative mental health and academic outcomes. Rutter’s (1979) recognition that various factors influence or affect the resilience reinforces the modes by which the current study examined educational resilience in investigating the holistic resources that students utilized to reach resilience.

Werner and Smith’s (1977) work highlighted the importance of examining resilience beyond adolescence and into young adulthood, which demonstrated that living within multiple stress levels does not mean children are unable to thrive and grow into capable adults. During all stages of life, individuals were able to function in healthy manners despite background. Werner and Smith (1977) found that despite poverty, family instability and conflict, and parental mental illness, children exhibited proficient critical thinking, communication and perceptual motor skills. In addition, during their late teens, these students had positive self-esteem, ambition and internal locus of control. As adults, these individuals connected to various sources of support within their community to accomplish resilience (Werner & Smith, 1977). These individuals’ ability to maintain positive mental health at various phases of their lives shows that resilience is not a short-term behavior. Werner and Smith’s (1977) work validates examining resilience, within a postsecondary education context, for it is important to comprehend how young adults function and react within their various environments. Consequently, in this study, educational resilience was examined within the higher education environment, as it is a major part of students’ lives. Therefore, examining resilience in conjunction with
education is germane to understanding how individuals, in environments outside their households, overcome adversity.

Thus, in order for people and systems to help, support or facilitate individuals achieving resilience and overcoming their adversities in multiple areas of their lives, research is needed. Resilience within educational systems is especially important because education is part of individuals’ foundational years. Werner and Smith (1977) posited that resilience is a dynamic ongoing life process that individuals draw upon as children, and advance as they mature, for it serves as a resource for life beyond preadolescence. This study explored how resilience evolved with children as they entered the postsecondary environment. For certain individuals, educational systems set the foundation for economic, social and professional careers. Thus, resilience should not only be examined within home environments but in all areas that it can occur.

The research analysis in this study is related to Garmezy et al.’s (1984) work, which advocated for analyzing not only successful students, but also educationally successful students whose lives’ are filled with and shaped within adversity. The research correlates to Garmezy’s (1984) research, which identified that educational environments serve and provide specific supports that foster at-risk students’ ability to achieve educational success. Garmezy et al. (1984) found that whether it is personal or environmental factors, students overcame adversities because their educational systems provided them with staff support, and engaged them in the environment. Results suggested that these students’ ability to thrive came from the support school environments provided students. Thus, to expand Garmezy’s (1984) work, this resilience
research study explored how individuals living within vulnerable circumstances are able to successfully triumph beyond their background or upbringing. Garmezy’s (1984) study confirmed that resilience is also related and connected to adversities found beyond home life.

Waxman, Gray and Padrón (2003) posited that outcomes from these pioneering studies indicated that multiple factors aid students in achieving resilience. The results are significant in identifying that at-risk populations have the resources and potential to execute or develop resilience despite their background. These studies offered three significant themes, connected to this study’s overarching research questions, in that they established that a) not all at-risk children succumb to their adversity, b) resilience is reached through individuals’ internal and external support systems c) resilience can arise in multiple areas. Combined, these findings offer an important contribution to this study’s purpose, by maintaining that resilience is a multifaceted and transferable phenomenon within individuals’ lives, which should not be thought of to happen in one specific area of life or achieved through a single method. This gives support for examining resilience in educational environments.

**Educational Resilience**

Educational resilience is a framework that could perhaps help in examining and describing how non-cognitive factors aid students in overcoming adversity in order to persist. Specifically, some Latino/a students, while identified as at-risk of not attaining a degree, do achieve a degree. Little is known about these students and how, if at all, non-cognitive factors operate to contribute to their persistence. Although educational
resilience studies expounded in this section on non-cognitive factors found that interior factors beyond family and finances contribute to Latino/a students’ persistence, the concept of resilience in relation to overcoming the at-risk factor of first-generation college student status is not specifically addressed. To date, no study can be identified which has specifically explored Latino/a first-generation college student persistence from this perspective. This study investigated internal and external resources, which contributed to Latino/a persistence within the phenomenon described as educational resilience.

Educational Resilience and Latino/as

Research established that some at-risk students are resilient within educational environments. Educational resilience is defined as being educationally successful despite residing within personal and societal adversity (Bernard, 1991; Gordon & Song, 1994; Masten, 1994; McMillian & Reed, 1994; Wang & Gordon, 1994; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997, 1998; Winfield, 1991). Non-cognitive factors, such as autonomy or high self-esteem that resulted in academic success (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1979; Wang et al., 1993), and external factors (e.g. teachers or peers) (Wang et al., 1993) facilitate educational resilience. Educational resilience was found useful in bringing about understanding of students, in educational systems, considered at higher risk of educational struggles or disappointment. Adversities associated with lower academic achievement, and/or trouble with the law, include poverty, low maternal education, low socioeconomic status, low birth-weight, family instability or having a mother with schizophrenia (Farran & McKinney, 1986; Kopp & Krakow, 1983; Masten & Garmezy,
The lens through which educational resilience engages in the discussion of persistence directly relates to the approach of the wider research questions, which is to examine Latino/a students considered at-risk due to their first-generation college status and race.

Educational resilience was identified as a fundamental concept that describes the positive educational attainment of at-risk or urban populations living with and within various risk factors (Barlett, 1994). Researchers identified that urban minority and underprivileged students have multiple factors and stressors that place them at high risk for academic failure (Attison & Juntman, 1994; Walsh, Howard, & Buckley, 1999). For example, Cummins (1986) and Noguera (1996, 2001) posited that racial and ethnic minority students in urban schools are vulnerable in majority-dominated school cultures, where limited knowledge of the English language, being of a lower class, and having a diverse cultural background may be seen as shortages. Despite the risks and adversity these students have encountered, empirical studies expounded below established that educational resilience among minority and improvised youth helped these students succeed. This section describes findings on the educational resilience of adolescents and postsecondary students, who have the following established educational adversities: first-generation status and Latino/a ethnicity.

Resilience research within an educational context is relatively recent (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994), and is embraced for its examination of the positive academic progress within at-risk groups rather than focusing on their deficits (e.g. poverty, minority status and family drug addiction) (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Waxman, Huang,
& Padrón, 1997; Wayman, 2002). Initial studies on educational resilience focused on pre-adolescents and adolescents, and within the last few years research has moved into postsecondary education (Arrellano & Padilla, 1996; Ceja, 2004; Goodwin, 2001; Holt, Mahowld, & DeVore, 2002; Horn & Chen, 1998; Jun 2000; Taylor & Swetman, 2000). Bridging resilience and education together has produced modest findings about educational resilience within at-risk populations, specifically students of color in urban areas (Waxman et al., 1997). Shifting the focus to educational resilience provides an opportunity to develop and enhance initiatives, which will sustain at-risk students within postsecondary educational systems.

Wang et al. (1997) posited that educational resilience is a product of the interaction between individuals and their environment. This is corroborated by empirical studies, which have identified that educational resilience is a consequence of at-risk populations, along with environmental and personal factors (Alva, 1991; Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Garmezy, 1991; McMillian & Reed, 1993; Rutter, 1987). Analysis of these studies has established that educational resilience transpires as a result of individual traits (e.g., reflection, motivation, academic desire) and external supports (e.g., parent, peers, staff, schools, environments). To illustrate how educational resilience connects to this research study, the section below expounds on empirical research findings examining adolescents and postsecondary students.

**Educational Resilience and Adolescent Empirical Studies**

In 1995, Alva and Padilla advocated for a conceptual framework to drive research that examined the “interaction among sociocultural, personal and environmental factors
in explaining the academic performance of Mexican American high school students” (p. 37), to move away from examining educational achievements through a unidirectional focus. Some scholars supported that contention (Gonzalez, 2001; Waxman et al., 1997), which Alva and Padilla emphasized would assess academic success through students’ own subjective perceptions and evaluations. Today, the approach that precedes such a framework is described as educational resilience. This section describes how the Latino/a population, despite adversities, execute educational resilience. Findings from these studies described educational resilience within the context of postsecondary education, for they conveyed that Latino/a adolescents’ exercise of the phenomenon relates to their enrollment in a postsecondary institution and/or achieving a degree.

Research found that parental relationships and interactions, both positive and negative, impact educational resilience (Catterall, 1998; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Kenny, Gallaher, Alvarez-Salvat, and Silsby (2002) quantitatively examined predominantly urban students, which included some Latino/a students, in an urban high school, (70% of whom were to be the first in their family to attend a postsecondary institution) and found that parental regard promoted educational resilience. Kenny et al. (2002) determined that students who had positive parental relationships utilized those relationships to build academic confidence as a defense against depression. Further, parents who encouraged or implored students toward finishing secondary education and continuing beyond high school fostered students’ belief in their academic ability, feelings of support, and educational resilience. Other studies posited that for Latino/a students, parents motivate them to continue their education and the attitude they yield while
undertaking educational endeavors (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Kenny et al., 2002). Catterall’s (1998) quantitative study, employing the National Center for Education Statistics data from 1988 determined that students considered at-risk (such as Latino/as) should not be labeled as such, for some of these students perform well and are committed to school. This is corroborated by Catterall’s (1998) findings that at-risk students were able to overcome academic failure between the 8th and 10th grade due to family support. Within an educational resilience framework, these studies found that parents of Latino/a students do serve as positive influences on educational undertakings.

For students who lack a parental presence, studies identified that that they can overcome their risks from support of peers, teachers or mentors. For example, teachers who encouraged educational achievement, and guided and supported students’ academic aspirations (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Catterall, 1998; Gonzales & Padilla, 1997; Kenny et al., 2002; Wang et al., 1997), promoted educational resilience within students. Gonzalez and Padilla’s (1997) quantitative work on Mexican American high school students found that when students felt a positive sense of belonging to their educational environments and educators, educational resilience ensued. The research also showed that educational resilience results when students established positive connections with teachers, mentors or peers. For example, Kenny et al. (2002) found that when parents were uninformed about postsecondary education or are unavailable, students looked to teachers for advice or encouragement. With regard to peers, Alva (1991) and Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) discovered that peers shape educational resilience for Latino/a students by providing educational support or enhancing the value placed on education. Alva (1991)
qualitatively examined 384 Latino/a students and found that educationally resilient students were (a) confident and prepared to attend college, (b) enjoyed attending school and undertaking school activities and, (c) had fewer conflicts at school and with peers. The findings indicated that positive teacher and peer relationships allowed students to achieve these behaviors. Kenny et al. (2002) conducted a study on 16 urban high school students, and similarly found that students regard peers as vital to their educational resilience because they serve as advisors and supporters of academic interests and aspirations. These studies collectively highlighted that relationships outside of the family are fundamental to achieving educational resilience.

Research also showed that engaging in extracurricular activities or school environments supports and/or sustains educational resilience. Catterall (1998) posited that students who engage in extracurricular activities connect to their environment and feel empowered educationally. As a result, they performed better academically and socially. Finn and Rock (1997) found that for urban populations such as Latino/a students, extracurricular activities developed their leadership skills, and built social and educational skills that they utilized to support and protect them from failing academically. The research identified that extracurricular opportunities allowed students to achieve educational success. Finn and Rock’s (1997) study of 1,803 minority students from low-income backgrounds (including Latino/as) demonstrated that “not all students deemed to be at risk for school problems, because of groups status characteristics, drop out of school or even suffer from poor performance” (p. 231). Finn and Rock (1997) established that Latino/a educational resilience was manifested by students who
conducted such actions as attending school, being prepared and arriving on-time, paying attention in class and making an effort to participate in their educational environment. Collectively, these studies indicated that students who are engaged in extracurricular activities or the educational community are able to foster educational resilience.

These assessments of adolescent Latino/a students and educational resilience confirmed that the educational resilience phenomenon is active and present among these students as they navigate secondary educational environments. Findings are beneficial because Latino/a adolescents are considered the most susceptible to academic failure or to drop out from high school. Yet despite this categorization, these studies affirmed that some of these students are educationally resilient. These studies demonstrated that educational resilience is attained through the engagement of various people and systems such as internal supports (e.g., academic attitude, reflection) or external supports (e.g., parents, peers, teachers or extracurricular activities). These empirical studies on adolescents indicated that for high school students to achieve educational resilience they must self-identify, or be identified by a professional. These studies suggested that educationally resilient students respond to their at-risk status by being proactive and seeking resources to overcome possible challenges. This research on educational resilience and adolescents provided an effective segue for research on resilience within postsecondary education because it indicated that much of the effort to achieve educational resilience is meant to ensure that students choose to attend a postsecondary institution.
This research creates a significant connection to this research study, which explored the educational resilience of Latino/a college students. Research on educational resilience in secondary educational environments builds interests about how educational resilience is exercised in postsecondary institutions, and how and if educational resilience continues beyond secondary education. As posited by Waxman, Huang, and Padron (1997), resilience is a dynamic process that is active and present within urban students, such as Latino/a students who are at risk of educational failure due to their background and circumstances. However, research needs to be conducted to examine how resilience evolves and continues as individuals mature and progress through various educational environments.

Although research found that Latino/a students’ educational resilience is fostered by reflecting on family or parental struggles (Gayles, 2005) or maintaining healthy judgments about their role and ability in educational environments (Gordon, 1995), the unanswered question is whether or to what extent does this translate to postsecondary environments. This question is noteworthy because at the postsecondary level these students have many characteristics tied to being the first in their family to decide and enroll in a postsecondary institution that positions them to be an at-risk college population (Ishitani, 2006; Terenzini et al., 1996). Thus, does the shift in environments make it difficult for these students to maintain a positive view about their educational role and ability in their new environment? This research study examined how Latino/a students overcome adversities as they persist through postsecondary institutions. More specifically, it asks how do Latino/a first-generation college students overcome risks to
persist and attain a college degree? This study explored how these students’ risk factors may or may not increase at the postsecondary level as a result of being the first in their families to work towards a postsecondary degree.

The benefit of prior studies is that they investigated educational resilience among a large number of Latino/a students, establishing resilience within the population. Although these studies created interest for educational resilience, they do little for understanding the phenomena within postsecondary education. Also, the studies are predominantly quantitative and do not present the opinions of students in their execution of educational resilience. The research minimally touches on the significance and role educational resilience play in the lives’ of adolescents as they enter postsecondary education, which results in a lack of rich understanding of educational resilience. Also, all of these studies suggested that postsecondary education is the ultimate goal for executing educational resilience, but they ceased to further analyze or explain how it influences educational resilience.

From foundational studies of resilience to studies on adolescent educational resilience, the research showed that educational resilience is a useful and viable concept that aids in understanding at-risk students. Consequently, further research is needed to solidify educational resilience’s impact on Latino/a students in postsecondary education. Although educational research indicated that at-risk Latino/a students are able to be educationally resilient despite their upbringing, the concept needs more research at the postsecondary level to enhance its merit. Hence, additional examinations of
postsecondary education may add more validity to the implied argument that not all Latino/a students succumb to their adversities.

**Postsecondary Education Empirical Studies and Educational Resilience**

Latino/a students continue to have or encounter adversities as they persist through postsecondary institutions, and like Latino/a adolescents, they are educationally resilient and able to achieve academic success. The predominantly qualitative empirical research on Latino/a college students described below indicated that students employ internal and external resources such as reflection, self-identifying as at-risk, parents’ position on education and behavior, teachers and mentors, and extracurricular activities to overcome challenges that arise related to their characterized risk factor(s). In order to position the Latino/a first-generation college student population relative to educational resilience, this section serves three purposes. The first is to describe the role that the above-mentioned factors have in Latino/as’ carrying out educational resilience. Next, is to describe how the phenomenon may be useful and informative for identifying how at-risk Latino/a first-generation college students can be guided and supported to persist and achieve a college degree. Finally, this section describes and identifies the literature gap drawing a parallel between college students and educational resilience. Specifically, I present information about Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence, and how educational resilience describes the process of overcoming adversity through a framework that considers both internal and external characteristics. Combined, these aims provide a distinctive and added understanding of how Latino/a first-generation college students can persevere despite their risk factors. Through educational resilience, these objectives aim
to position that Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence can be affected by multifarious elements.

**Reflection.** Similar to adolescents, reflection is identified as a factor that postsecondary students use in order to be educationally resilient. Students reflect on their upbringing (Gonzalez, 2007) and their desire for upward mobility to achieve academic success (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado & Cortes, 2009). Perez et al. (2009) and Arellano and Padilla (1996) found that Latino/a students reflected on their parents, who often had no postsecondary education and struggled to support the family, to inspire their educational efforts. Arellano and Padilla’s (1996) qualitative study of 30 undergraduate Mexican Americans, found that ambition for educational success and having attitudes about education, both positive and negative, produced educational resilience. In exploring highly successful college students, Arellano and Padilla searched for the characteristics that differentiated successful from non-successful students, and the relationship among those factors that facilitated success. While Perez et al. (2009) questioned the social and environmental characteristics that mediated Latino/as’ school success despite factors that positioned them to experience minimal academic achievement, Perez et al. (2009) also asked how a risk and resilience framework could better increase understanding of the academic achievements of Latino/a immigrants. The above studies asserted that educational resilience is achieved by a combination of what inspires, angers, or motivates Latino/a students.

Gonzalez (2007) reaffirmed these findings in his interviews of 12 recent Ph.D. Latina professionals, by findings that Latinas reflected “to articulate and justify their
continued existence in the academy through their sense of purpose, which included the long-term advancement of the Latina community” (p. 297). Specifically, Gonzalez asked, “What were the educational experiences of Latino/a faculty during their doctoral studies and how did they survive and thrive in the face of institutional challenges”? (p. 292). Through semi-structured interviews, the study identified that Latina students nurtured educational resilience by isolating themselves and reflecting on their goals and aspirations. These studies corroborated that reflection fosters educational ability and academic perseverance (Arellano & Padilla 1996; Ceja, 2004; Gonzalez, 2007; Morales, 2008). For students such as Latino/as, who have academic and social risk factors, reflection helps them persist by drawing on their inner views to address the challenges they face within the college environment and communities. Reflection appears to be useful in Latino/a student persistence because it allows them to recall that their resolve for a higher education did not begin at the college level but years prior, allowing them to have the inner strength needed to stay the course and pursue their academic endeavors.

**Self-identifying as at-risk.** Latino/as also looked inward to carry out educational resilience and persist within the higher education level by self-identifying as at-risk (Arellano & Padilla 1996; Morales, 2000). Morales (2000) conducted a qualitative study of five Dominican postsecondary students at risk of academic failure due to their low socioeconomic and ethnic minority status, and found that upon entering postsecondary institutions they self-identified as at-risk. The study “sought to address the question of the process by which protective factors present in the lives of educationally resilient Dominican American students operate” (Morales, 2000, p. 8). In-depth interviews
revealed that students recognized their potential for academic struggle due to their upbringing, so they proactively solicited academic support from people and departments. These students were steadfast about not succumbing to academic deficits.

Identifying as at-risk students also surfaced among Latino/as with parents who struggled economically. Ceja (2004), in a qualitative examination of 20 Latina students, questioned how parents influenced and impressed college within their students and how resilience brought understanding to their behavior. Findings explained that Latino/a students self-identified as at-risk of replicating their parents’ economic struggles if they did not work towards a postsecondary degree. To ensure they achieved their goal, they sought academic assistance from university staff and departments. These studies are useful for understanding that Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence is not facilitated by disregarding background, and academic challenges which can potentially create academic, social or economic struggles at the college level. For the reason that, being conscious of their vulnerabilities allowed Latino/a first-generation college students to foster and develop support systems that they may not have developed if they believed themselves free of academic troubles. Ultimately, Latino/as comprehension of their limitations empowered them.

**Parents.** How students are enabled to persist is especially understood through examining their parents’ role within students’ college experience. At the postsecondary level, Latino/as overcome adversity to achieve educational resilience as a result of parental support and/or observing parents’ behavior. Cabrera and Padilla’s (2004) qualitative study sought to comprehend how “home, school, peers, and community
contexts supported the high academic attainment of two [Latino/a Ivy League] students” (p. 154) with high adversity and an improvised background, and how these contexts contributed to their resilience from before kindergarten to college graduation. The study revealed that mothers were vessels of encouragement, which motivated students to attain a postsecondary degree. The semi-structured interviews identified that students praised their mothers for setting the foundation for academic success by role modeling and instilling a positive work ethic and encouraging academics. Although parents’ work experience was not within a college context, students generalized parents’ experiences as a foundation for how they approached any experience, which in this case was higher education. Perez et al.’s (2009) quantitative study also found that parents, with no postsecondary education, valued postsecondary education and impressed those thoughts upon their children. Perez et al.’s (2009) study of undocumented Latino/a high school and college-aged students found that individuals were resilient when parents emphasized higher education’s future value and encouraged it, because they were instilled with valuing education.

To discern further about parents’ impact on Latino/a students’ educational resilience, studies with larger sample size must be conducted. Thus, this study expanded research by examining the experiences of 20 Latino/a first-generation college students. These small qualitative studies demonstrated that for Latino/as, despite the risk factors that may stem or result from their parents not having a college background, they are not absent from the persistence process. Moreover, their parents are strongly connected to the
foundation for their students wanting to achieve a degree and continuing to strive for a degree.

**Teachers and mentors.** Research also identified that teachers or mentors helped students achieve educational resilience by substituting as parents and as educational advocates when parents were unable, because of their minimal postsecondary experience or knowledge (Cabrera, & Padilla 2004; Holt 2002; Morales, 2008). Students proactively connected with teachers and mentors who valued postsecondary education to solicit advice and support their educational aspirations (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). Arellano and Padilla (1996) and Morales (2000) determined that for Latino/a students, external family relationships assisted them in overcoming their adversity of not having parents who know the postsecondary culture, which resulted in limited academic and emotional support. Morales (2008) qualitatively inquired about the significant differences among five high achieving low-income male and female college students of color, and how their perspectives could be interpreted. Research concluded that mentors contributed significantly to resilient female and male students because they took an interest and helped guide them. The findings revealed that particularly for males, their same gender mentors filled the role of an absentee father and/or need for a male role model. Collectively these studies revealed that Latino/as overcome adversity by seeking teachers and mentors to instill academic confidence, and support their educational undertakings. The proposed study aims to gain further descriptions of how the teacher/mentor external relationships manifested into internal support for students. While these studies identified that teachers and mentors contribute to Latino/as achieving educational resilience, more
descriptions are needed to gather how the advice from teachers and/or mentors transferred into gaining internal academic confidence. The current studies did not offer sufficient information.

**Co-curricular activities.** Another environmental factor that aids Latino/a students in their execution of educational resilience is co-curricular activities. Although research about this factor is limited, the findings indicated that engaging in co-curricular activities at the postsecondary stage is significant for Latino/a undocumented youth. For example, Perez et al. (2009) found that 110 undocumented Latino/a high school students, at risk of academic failure because of low-income status and family stressors, performed better academically as measured by their participation in such co-curricular activities like sports, band, youth clubs, or community service activities. Co-curricular activities are found to serve as a protective factor for students by connecting them to their educational environments and facilitating healthy academic relationships. These studies reported that students engaged in co-curricular activities, when faced with educational hardships, overcome academically and did not allow themselves to fail. Instead, when students engaged in co-curricular activities they were competent and steadfast about their educational success. These students upheld their persistence because their co-curricular participation allowed them to triumph over feeling separate from or a lack of understanding of the community as a result of their low-income status or family pressures. Co-curricular activities allowed Latino/as to have an equal footing with peers because their participation allowed for greater integration in school communities, which resulted in their educational resilience.
These studies’ findings are significant for Latino/a students because this population is considered at higher risk of not enrolling or achieving a postsecondary degree due to their background characteristics. These studies set the foundation for exploring educational resilience in higher education by reinforcing that the phenomena functions in Latino/a students’ lives as they persist to achieve a post-baccalaureate degree. The studies indicated that Latino/a students do not elude adversity as they progress through educational environments. Also, the findings illustrated that while these students overcame their adversity in the postsecondary environment, they innately and proactively solicited resources to ensure their educational resilience.

**Summary**

Findings from research using educational resilience are important because they identified two important concepts about the function of non-cognitive factors in Latino/a persistence. First, Latino/a students frequently seek support from non-cognitive sources to persevere academically. Secondly, factors that influence perseverance are not all provided by external or institutional sources. In fact, this research showed that perseverance for Latino/a students, at times, comes from sources often emphasized as risk factors, such as parents and self-identifying as at-risk. The research suggested that non-cognitive factors could be empowering for these students. However, further research is essential to further corroborate and provide understanding on how non-cognitive factors enhance understanding of Latino/a students’ persistence.

Researching Latino/a first-generation college students within the educational resilience framework maybe useful for this population because it credits students with the
ability to persist despite having various risk factors. The above research conveyed that academically successful at-risk students are examined within the context of educational resilience to identify a deeper understanding of how they are able to achieve (Arrellano & Padilla, 1996; Ceja, 2004; Morales 2008). Conducting such research identifies that Latino/a students are educationally resilient, due to internal and external sources, which may assist educational environments in creating or modifying services within or for students who continue to struggle in academic institutions. Executing a study exploring educational resilience serves to help professionals develop competence about Latino/a students not persisting or doing well academically in higher education institutions. Morales (2000) posited that identifying the factors that at-risk students enact to achieve resilience is important because those elements are directly connected and mitigated to specific risk factors. It is important to understand and further explore how these opposing factors interrelate (Morales, 2000), especially to promote resilience in others (Morales, 2008). However, in order to fully support Latino/a students, Morales (2000) noted that researchers needed to further explore resilience among Latino/as with varying backgrounds and within different institution types. Although students’ needs change over time, and because there are some matters that advocates cannot influence, resilience may be a process that can be enacted, adaptable or learned by families, schools and/or communities in order to facilitate students’ academic success.

The existing studies on Latino/as and educational resilience are not sufficient because they insubstantially examined the surface of educational resilience within the Latino/a population. Studies did not examine Latino/a first-generation college students as
seniors or having reached graduation candidature identify how educational resilience was executed during their undergraduate career. Minimal research exists to show the presence or demonstration of educational resilience at the end of the undergraduate career. Also, no study was identified that explored how educational resilience could explain Latino/a students’ persistence. Also, the previously presented research highlighted several gaps in the research, which impedes our ability to gain a clear understanding of educational resilience within Latino/a postsecondary students. This creates a justification for expanding the research on the educational resilience of Latino/a students.

Further, the number of studies on educational resilience and Latino/a students in higher education is nominal. Roughly eight research studies have been executed during the last 15 years. This number is minute compared to the large amount of studies conducted on persistence, specifically among Latino/a first-generation college students. Despite the small number, these research studies are especially significant to our understanding of educational resilience because they predominantly examined underrepresented populations, who at the postsecondary institutions are least likely to achieve a degree.

Further this research sought to further identify internal and external factors that contribute to educational resilience. Previous studies acknowledged that family, peers and teachers contribute to educational resilience, but research on other factors identified in adolescent research (e.g., reflection, self-identifying as at risk, motivation) is minimal. Thus, more research is required to identify how these factors contribute to educational resilience. For example, more research is needed on the impact of co-curricular activities,
which is only found in the in kindergarten through 12th grade research, and minimally examined within postsecondary education. Also, with the exception of Holt (2002), resilience research did not address financial issues and how this factor influenced educational resilience. In Holt’s (2002) study, outcomes indicated that financial aid support and awareness significantly predicted and affected educational resilience, yet no additional studies are available to validate or invalidate the findings. This is similar to Morales’ (2008) study, which revealed that males and females had a strong motivation to achieve a professional career, in anticipation of enrolling into postsecondary institutions. Females developed more of an academic plan while men were ambiguous about their plans, but both were strongly inspired to attend college. These two studies on finances and motivation contribute much to educational resilience research, and set a tone for advancing research. However, the studies provide scarce understanding about the relationship between educational resilience and those factors.

Higher education as a context for study was also lacking in previous research. Morales and Trotman (2004) encouraged research in K-16 and beyond because Latino/a students face difficult challenges when entering predominantly White institutions due to the fact they are entering environments that are Eurocentric-based in behavior, function and populations. These students’ college interactions, behaviors and perceptions are influenced by the differences they bring to and that exists within the educational environments. Increasing educational resilience research within higher education is essential because groups such as Latino/a first-generation college students enroll at considerably lower numbers than other sub-populations as described in Chapter One.
Hence, this research study offers new information and insights to aid in their educational success. Previous research indicated that despite the efforts of scholars to understand Latino/a college students, there remains a gap in their enrollment. Thus, new perspectives and theories, analyzing their perseverance, may be useful in expanding how postsecondary education can understand and ultimately support their enrollment.

The research within this review relayed that at-risk populations exercised educational resilience to help them thrive and persist once enrolled in postsecondary institutions. However, further research is needed to develop a better understanding of the factors that influence or affect educational resilience during the educational persistence process. Educational resilience studies have not examined college students of color who are economically and/or academically disadvantaged, and are first-generation college students and from the inner-city (Gonzalez, 2007). Addressing this research gap provides a more holistic understanding of educational resilience’s role within the Latino/a persistence at the level of higher education. In order to facilitate this research and identify descriptions of how non-cognitive factors influence Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological paradigm is applied.

**Conceptual Framework: Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Paradigm**

By examining the execution of educational resilience via external resources, the phenomena is placed within three environmental contexts: individual, interpersonal (family and peer network factors), and societal (school environment and the community (Egelan et al., 1993). When investigating resilience as a result of external resources, individuals’ perceptions, attitudes and feelings are measured (Egelan et al., 1993).
Multiple layers of individuals’ lives and experiences are considered or expended to overcome adversity.

Scholars have worked to understand the ways or means that individuals minimize the negative effects of living within at-risk settings, and how they develop and successfully adjust (Olsson et al., 1991). Following this precedent, the conceptual framework chosen to guide this study is Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological paradigm of human development.

Bronfenbrenner is recognized for putting emphasis on the interrelationship of each individual with his or her environment (Salkind, 2004). The paradigm expounds on how an individual’s maturation is dependent on a person’s environment. The foundation for Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) assertion is that people do not exist in isolation, but rather they live within dynamic systems and/or contexts made up of such influences as generation status and parents’ educational attainment. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner’s theory as the guiding frame, I proposed a model that focused on Latino/a students who have made it to the point of graduation, in the face of risk factors associated with being a first-generation college student.

Bronfenbrenner (1993) distinguished the context-specific person-environment interaction that effects an individual’s psychological development. Specifically, the bioecological theory of human development is defined as:

The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate setting in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these setting, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 107)
This section describes the ways each facet of Bronfenbrenner’s model will enrich
descriptions and understandings of how Latino/a first-generation college students persist
employing an educational resilience framework. I then explain how this ecological
paradigm will help to identify the behaviors and sources from their external and internal
systems that students used to achieve educational resilience.

Bronfenbrenner’s study of human development across numerous cultures
prompted him to posit that human beings are resilient, adaptable, and have great potential
and capability to adjust and construct the environments that they live within
(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Additionally, Bronfenbrenner emphasized that when
investigating individuals from various perspectives, one is able to pinpoint distinct
dispositions and interactions through and within cultures. He stressed that peoples’
relation with and views of their environment, as opposed to what occurs in reality, affect
human development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further asserted that a person has the
“remarkable potential” to respond in favorable ways to both their opportunities and
barriers (p. 7). For this reason, this theoretical framework is germane to gaining
descriptions of the external and internal resources that Latino/a students utilize to execute
educational resilience in the face of challenges common to first generation college
students.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological model entails five systems which together work as
“nested, interdependent, dynamic structures” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 4) and form a
person’s ecology. According to Renn (2003),within the first four levels an “individual
receives messages about identity, developmental forces and challenges, and resources for
addressing those challenges” (p. 388). The subsequent section explains all five layers and how they correlate with this study’s framework.

**Microsystem**

The *microsystem* describes the relationship amongst the individual and their direct environments (Salahuddin, 2005). It “is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the 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” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005b, p. 148). Examples involve such contexts as family, educational environments, peer groups and the workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Although family is considered especially significant for developing personality (Swick, 2004) and learning how to live (Pipher, 1996), the other groups are also important because the interaction amongst all of the relationships profoundly affect an individual’s growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Further, these environments heavily influence the individual’s disposition, and the more reassuring and nurturing the healthier the individual will develop. For individuals, the background includes such microsystems as families, origins, external family relationships and/or friendships. However, for those enrolled in higher education, the context expands to include college peers and/or student organizations. Research posited that caring relations between children, parents and/or caretakers can provoke healthy personalities (Swick, 2004). The attachment to parents establishes how children develop trust-building parents (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000).
Along these lines, this study examined how family, peers, and relationships external to the individual *internally* nurtured experiences with higher education, and how they manifested into confidence and motivation to achieve a postsecondary degree. This study considered it important to investigate how parental, peer and other external relationships built internal trust within Latino/a first-generation college students that they could and would achieve a higher education degree.

**Mesosystem**

Mesosystem refers to the interaction between two or more microsystems. For example, Renn (2003) described that in relation to Latino/a ethnic identity:

The messages a student receives about what it means to be “really Latino” in one microsystem (a friendship group of other Latinos) may be supported or challenged by messages from another microsystem (the professor of his class on the cultures of Latin American). (p. 389)

Renn further described that messages may vary from family or peer groups. For postsecondary students, *mesosystems* entail exchanges among school, family, social and work life.

Thus, this study sought to understand how teachers and mentors engaged in ways that expanded, shaped, or taught students about higher education, and filled gaps in information about higher education that parents could not or did not know how to provide. Gaining explanations of this process from the students’ perspective is especially important to understand how teachers and mentors internally permeated these students’ philosophies about what it means to be a college student.

Swick and Williams (2006) described that the significance of mesosystems it connects two or more systems that individuals function, which go beyond parents and
family. The mesosytems considers and gives respect to the community and individuals that extend and offer support from these environments. Unique to this study is examining how cultural connections within the higher education environment work in community with each other to help Latino/a first-generation college students persist. Research has identified that cultural connections help to connect another environment, and move outside a two-party relation. Such a connection is especially important for Latino/a students, for not having such a connection could place them at risk of not persisting. A similar exploration is needed for Latino/a first-generation college students reared in a family environment where their Latino/a identity was or was not affirmed. How does that help them overcome academic challenges in relation to their role as a first-generation college student?

Exploring relationships among the various microsystems that make up mesosytems is important because children need to have caring adults beyond parents (Pipher, 1996). Without them, families are inclined to fall into chaos (L’Abate, 1990). In the case of Latino/a first-generation college students, the distress places them at risk of not being educationally resilient.

Exosystem

The outer surface of Bronfenbrenner’s includes the exosystem and macrosystem. The exosystem is comprised of places where a person is non-existent, but these places still influence individual development. Renn (2003) described these settings as: academic major, financial aid award and parents’ income. Parents’ workplace (e.g., Eckenrode & Gore, 1990), family social networks (Cochran et al. 1990) and neighborhood-community
contexts (Pence, 1988) are three exosystems identified as especially affecting children or youth through their influence on family, school, and peer groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In relation to this study, such settings include parents’ educational history and/or the Latino/a first-generation college student’s understanding postsecondary education.

A major instance of how this study aimed to understand an exosystem’s influence on educational resilience and persistence is in how parents’ educational history and students psychological awareness of their parents’ lack of higher education experience affects their own experience.

Exosystems are vicariously experienced and have a direct bearing on the individual. Research on exosystems is important because they can be emboldening or devaluing (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Further, absence from a system does not decrease the power in individuals’ lives (Garbino, 1992). Thus, for Latino/a first-generation college students self-identifying as at-risk, it may be a way for these students to cope with parents who have no advanced degree. It is essential to identify how these exosystems empowered college students rather than degraded them. Understanding the psychological impact of systems on students’ persistence is just as important as exploring the concrete organizations and relationships.

**Macrosystem**

The *macrosystem* are the environments which create the “overall framework for and individual’s developmental possibilities” (Renn, 2003, p. 272). Bronfenbrenner (1979) gave examples of macrosystems including race/ethnicity, social class and region (urban vs. rural). This structure includes shared influences that occur during a particular
time such as historical events, cultural beliefs or being aware of race/ethnicity. In effect, Bronfenbrenner’s examples highlight how belonging to the Latino/a first-generation college student population enhances these students’ persistence to achieve a college degree.

In college, for example, it is important to examine the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students reared in family environments where their Latino/a ethnic/racial identity was or was not affirmed. Essentially, it is crucial to question how ethnicity/racial identity enabled educational persistence to achieve educational resilience. Another need is examining how they overcame academic challenges in relation to being first-generation college students. For example, in relation to this study, a student’s social class may cause one to work hard from observing one’s parents devote themselves or struggle in their blue-collar jobs. As a result, college students are tenacious about applying a hard work philosophy so as not to relive their parents’ social class. Thus, exploring how Latino/a first-generation college students apply their working class hard work ethic to college environment is useful for understanding their educational resilience.

Other examples may include teachers and mentors, who positively impact students by providing higher education knowledge or motivation that may empower students to be engaged within and committed to their educational aspirations.

Garbarino (1992) asserted that a macrosystem is an umbrella of beliefs, services and supports for families, children and their parents to be safeguarded from disadvantage or risk. Thus, in the research, macrosystems are examined to specifically attain
explanations of how internal systems or how external systems internally influence Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence to graduation.

**Chronosystem**

Finally, the *chronosystem* encloses the four systems by positioning human progress within time. This aspect of the model examines a person’s transformation and stability within the environment they live, specifically highlighting how they develop and change in regard to family relationships, interactions, and context (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). According to Bronfenbrenner:

> The individual’s own developmental life course is seen as embedded in and powerfully shaped by conditions and events occurring during the historical period through which the person lives….A major factor influencing the course and outcome of human development is the timing of biological and social transitions as they relate to the culturally defined age, role expectations, and opportunities occurring throughout the life course. (p. 641)

Chronosystems can be especially useful for understanding Latino/a persistence, for it considers changes or consistency over time within individuals and environments. A unique look at the chronosystem in this study involves exploring how validation, over the course of a student’s tenure as a college student, impacts Latino/a first-generation college students’ ability and belief in self as a student.

The use of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological framework is functional for this study, as it allows the researcher to examine the intricate systems that contribute to a first-generation college student’s persistence. It also facilitates the researcher’s ability to gain examples among the various ecosystems of the internal and external resources that Latino/a first-generation college students utilize to achieve educational resilience and persistence. For some Latino/as, the environments in which they engage and their support
resources may be complex and unique to their experiences as first-generation college students. Thus, the ecological paradigm allows the researcher to explain how the internal and external resources that these students rely on may be directly related to their first-generation status.

Research often attempts to explain student persistence from a framework that does not place students at the center of being responsible for their own persistence. This is counterproductive to understanding persistence for “it is pointless to try to assess the quality or quantity of social support experienced by children without considering the nature of the ecological contexts in which the children live, and fit between the support and the context” (Tietjen, 1989, p. 39). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological framework provides the contextual framework needed to gain descriptions and understanding of the many identity and relational dimensions that non-cognitive factors influence in a Latino/a first-generation college student’s achievement of educational resilience and persistence of higher education degree.

**Overall Summary**

The studies on non-cognitive elements within higher education persistence research and educational resilience verify that such factors are significant to Latino/a persistence. However, the inconsistency of research on the specific factors influencing persistence requires that more research be done. This study aims to further understand non-cognitive factors among Latino/as first-generation college students that may assist in their educational resilience. By positioning persistence within an educational resilience framework, examining non-cognitive factors will further advance the notion that
“adversity is not a reason for failure” (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004, p. 167). This study complements research on the Latino/a first-generation college student population, who despite economic, cultural and social barriers, achieve a higher education degree.

In an attempt to build on the above results, this research involved conducting a qualitative study on Latino/a first-generation college students at the point of graduation. The subsequent chapter describes the methods and procedures that were employed to execute this research. Specifically, Chapter Three describes in detail the student population, institution type and guidelines that shaped the study. Also, the research questions used to gather data are outlined, followed by the analysis process that transpired. The aim for the methodological strategy was to gather ample accounts from Latino/a students on how they maneuvered challenges as a first-generation college student to draw on their educational resilience characteristic rather than academic withdrawal or failure, and ultimately persist to graduation.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

The literature review demonstrated that some Latino/a students are academically successful by drawing multiple upon sources to achieve academic success. However, there is minimal research on educational resilience in regards to providing explanations about how Latino/a first-generation college students undertake and achieve the phenomenon (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Coronado & Cortes, 2009; Gonzalez, 2007; Morales, 2000; Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Specifically, additional research positioned first-generation college student identity as a risk factor, which the educational resilience phenomenon allows for, and how Latino/as achieve their degree despite this risk factor is needed. The available studies offered partial understanding about how this population achieves educational resilience. Thus, this study sought to expand educational resilience research by acquiring explanations on the internal and external resources, from ecosystems, social systems and/or networks that students internalized which helped this population achieve or facilitate their educational resilience. The goal of this study was not to identify how Latino/a first-generation college students grasp the academic material to reach the point of graduation, but to attain internal descriptions about how and which resources; relationships and environments contribute to their educational resilience. The aim of this
study was to facilitate a better understanding of what the overall learning and post-secondary experience is like for this population.

In order to attain descriptions about how Latino/a first-generation college students achieved or facilitated the education resilience phenomenon, qualitative research was employed. This chapter explains the research design and strategy that the researcher identified to be most useful in answering the proposed research questions. Specifically, this section illustrates aspects of the study such as research method, student participants, proposed site, research procedure, limitations and confidentiality.

**Research Method**

**Phenomenology**

Resilience integrated with education, in this study, is described as a phenomenon. Consequently, a phenomenological research design was employed. Phenomenology focuses on describing the meaning of lived experience for individuals with regard to a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The research design is based on the philosophical perspectives of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 1998). Husserl wrote that:

Researchers search for the essential, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness of where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning. (as cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 52)

Husserl (as cited in Creswell, 1998) advocated that the scientific method was not the only source of knowledge and asserted that there are many ways of understanding, and the context of any situation is key to comprehending a phenomenon. Schutz (1967)
expanded phenomenology by concentrating on everyday members of society and their everyday life, specifically on their social interactions and the meanings that stem from those contacts.

A phenomenological approach was employed to encourage students to reflect, and recall their lived experiences in order to examine students’ insights and views. Creswell (2013) stated that phenomenology’s primary purpose is to allow a small group of individuals to describe their meaning of a phenomenon. Phenomenology is fitting for this study as it aims to gather descriptions and reflections about how students overcame the risk factor identified in the research; first-generation status. Thus, as these students participated in an in-depth structured interview, they were prompted to describe how they achieved their degree considering their first-generation identity. Once the descriptions were attained, the researcher worked to derive “general or universal meaning” and “the essence of structures of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

Consequently, using a phenomenological framework is an appropriate methodology for this study given that it does not impose a set of factors or conditions for which to study the phenomenon. The method situates that the analysis should be based on the lived experiences of a particular person or community. Educational resilience does not enact a pre-established set of factors to study a phenomenon, but instead encourages exploration to be revealed from that participant’s understanding. Examining educational resilience from a phenomenological framework allows for broader research development regarding Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence.
Willis (2007) explained that a phenomenological research design narrowly studies students’ experiences related to their philosophy, psychology and social perception. Schutz (1967) posited that meaning is found by reflecting on the experience, not solely having the experience. Thus, this study prompted students to vividly communicate their educational experiences, and how they overcame adversity. The phenomenology research design aided in attaining those descriptions because of its regard that individuals’ perspectives are the essence of understanding the many situations that shape life.

**Methods of Data Collection**

This phenomenological study “is one that focuses on the descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 107). To facilitate gathering detailed and meaningful descriptions of how individuals experience the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990), in-depth interviews are important to conducting a phenomenological study (Patton, 2002). At the outset, while comprehension of a phenomenon is sensory, interpretation is essential to understanding one’s phenomenological experience, thus the experience must be thoroughly described (Patton, 2002). In order to attain descriptions of the meaning of educational resilience for these Latino/a first-generation college students, the present study utilized guided, in-depth individual interviews as a research method.

**Guided In-depth Individual Interviews**

A guided in-depth interview approach was conducted to allow for examination of identical topics and to ask similar questions to each student. An in-depth interview was
essential to understand the essence of educational resilience among Latino/a first-generation college students and to attain thick and rich descriptions. Phenomenology research typically presumes that individuals experiencing the phenomenon have a shared understanding with the occurrence, and seeks to identify those similarities. “The commonality of the experience is called an essence” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 397) and seeking out that common experience is the defining characteristic of the phenomenological research method (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The researcher’s rationale for an in-depth interview was to gather students’ own words, voice, language and accounts of educational resilience. This is essential so that “participants can share what they know and have learned and can add a dimension to our understanding of the situation that questionnaire data does not reveal” (Lichtman, 2006, p. 119). The rationale for the qualitative interview is that the guided and in-depth portion of the interview allowed the researcher to gather the necessary descriptions. A guided interview allows the researcher to ask a general set of questions, and to vary the questions if the situation demands (Lichtman, 2006). The in-depth portion of the interview was incorporated to give students the opportunity to illustrate their own stories on their conditions (McCracken, 1988). However, if a student’s response was not forthcoming, the guided interview allowed the researcher to formulate spontaneous and loosely structured questions (Lichtman, 2006).

Students were asked open-ended questions regarding self, family, relationships and networks all in relation to their first-generation status and educational experience (Appendix D). The questions were asked to prompt students to reflect about their post-
secondary educational experience. The interview and questions were developed with the goal of inciting students to voice rich descriptions, and bring about vivid accounts of their experience with educational resilience. Johnson and Christensen (2008) suggested “for research participants to explore their experiences, they must be able to relive it in their minds, and focus on the experience and nothing else” (p. 398). These in-depth interviews were structured to stimulate students to describe what contributed to their educational success despite or because of their first-generation status.

**Research Student Participants**

In order to acquire descriptions of lived experiences, Latino/a first-generation college students who have achieved educational resilience were solicited for this study. The study aimed to explore as many male and female students as possible. Upon beginning data collection, the researcher assessed the data being collected to determine if the data was saturated with similar answers or if more data should be collected. The present study is composed of 10 female and nine male research participants. Creswell (1998) asserted that when conducting a phenomenological study it is most important to interview “individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their conscious experiences” (p. 111). Students were recruited with special attention to ensure the following criteria was met: (1) be and self-identify as a first-generation college student, (2) ethnically/racially self-identify as Hispanic/Latino/a/Chicano, (3) be a post-secondary college junior or senior who enrolled immediately after high school graduation, (4) on academic course to graduate in May or August 2013 or 2014 and (5) have a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher. These criteria were established
based on the research in support of this study. The study’s first hypothesis is educational resilience is achieved if students are able to academically persevere and persist to graduation, despite having the adversity of first-generation status. The study’s second hypothesis is that Latino/a first-generation college juniors or seniors, enrolled in higher education institutions, and positioned to graduate have achieved required academic standards which validates they are educationally resilient.

The logic on how to recruit students for this study was based on a purposive strategy, in that students were chosen not for representativeness, but rather for what Creswell (2005) referred to as a purposeful sample. For this study, students were solicited in order bring about understanding to the resilience phenomenon. Students solicited for this study were recruited through purposeful sampling to certify that qualification characteristics are held. Johnson (1995) described purposeful sampling as one in which the researcher classifies the significant characteristics of a population and then works to locate individuals with those traits.

In order to achieve purposeful sampling, the researcher contacted various departments at Loyola University Chicago: Student Diversity and Multicultural Affairs (SDMA), Student Activities and Greek Affairs, School of Communication, School of Education, and College of Arts and Sciences. Students were recruited through an e-mail solicitation distributed by department directors, to individuals they pre-determined as potential qualifying participants. The researcher asked the director of each department to e-mail the recruitment flyer to at least 10 students who matched the participant criteria. This qualitative approach to recruiting is a strategy wherein specific people, location or
actions are carefully selected because the required information is best obtained from pre-identified subjects (Maxwell, 2005). This course was taken to ensure participant selection of Latino/a first-generation college students who could speak about and describe educational resilience.

In addition, a snowball sample was performed (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Snowball sampling was utilized by asking students, selected as student participants early in the process, to encourage peers who may fit the criteria to consider participating in the study. Employing a snowball sampling was useful for this study because it is a sampling approach identified as valuable when trying to obtain student participants from widely distributed or small populations and when “key selection criteria are characteristics which might not be widely disclosed by individuals or which are too sensitive for a screening interview” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 94). Given that recruiting Latino/a college students who self-identify as first-generation, may not be an identity candidly revealed, and could be considered sensitive information to some individuals, snowball sampling was incorporated to ensure broad enlistment measures were taken to attain student participants.

**Study Procedure**

In order to secure student participants, a recruitment letter (see appendix A) was e-mailed. The letter introduced the researcher, her background, her rationale in conducting the study and her institutional connection. Also, students were informed of the study’s purpose, the interview length, format, and time commitment. The potential students were informed that a Loyola department staff member, from the above-
mentioned offices, suggested him or her as a potential participant, but there was no obligation to participate and she or he was merely being asked to consider partaking in the study. Students were pre-qualified for the study, based on the recommendation of the Loyola staff member. To confirm student participation and qualifications, students were asked to complete a survey, which is described in more detail below. Upon securing qualified students, each student was individually scheduled for a one-on-one in-depth interview.

**In-depth Individual Interviews**

Interviews were executed individually with each student to further investigate what internal and external resources contributed to their persistence and helped to achieve or facilitate educational resilience considering the first-generation status. A responsive interviewing method was utilized because the approach draws from interpretive constructionist philosophy, wherein the worth of a topic or event derives from the meaning individuals assign to it (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Thus, Latino/a first-generation college student participants were asked open-ended questions about how internal and external resources contributed to their educational resilience. Specifically, how the resources helped them rise above their first-generation student status.

The in-depth interview allowed the researcher to come into an interview conversation without preconceived notions, and allowed the research participant to explain the dimensions of how they achieved educational resilience from their perspective. Further, for this proposed study, research participants were offered the option of rephrasing questions, following up on interesting leads, redirecting the
interview conversation if and when needed and flexibility to redirect the interview conversation to explore why individuals feel they way they do (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This data collection method allowed the present study’s research participants to provide information-rich data about how they facilitated or achieved educational resilience to attain their college degree. In-depth interviews allowed for the exploration of several themes revealed from participants’ views by providing deference for them to construct their responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The interviews lasted approximately 1 and 1/2 to 2 hours. All of the interviews took place on campus in convenient locations for both the participants and the researcher. Interviews were private to create physical and emotional comfort, and to allow for a meaningful and genuine interview process to occur between the participant and researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

**Student Confidentiality**

Prior to beginning the study, the researcher’s ethical obligations, responsibility and data handling procedures were explained to the student. This maintained the integrity of the study and protected students’ confidentiality. Another method for retaining students’ confidentiality was to give research participants the option to remain anonymous within the study by selecting a pseudonym. The latter question was asked within the student questionnaire and verbally to each research participant. Those research participants who desired a pseudonym were asked to self-select one prior to beginning the interview. Those who did not select a pseudonym were asked how he or she wanted to be referred in the study, and 17 of the 19 students elected to use their own name. Next, the student was informed that although their confidentiality was protected,
the research auditor and/or dissertation chair would need to review research materials. For example, the research auditor would review the researcher’s field notes. However, no additional people were given access to the data or accompanying documents. All research remained in the researchers’ possession, if not being utilized or reviewed by research auditor or dissertation chair. Research materials were placed in a locked file cabinet. Also, interview notes and recordings that were transcribed were saved on a password protected MacBookPro computer and backed-up on an external hard drive. All research materials and devices were kept locked in a secured file cabinet when not in the researcher’s possession or use.

**Informational Survey**

Prior to beginning the interview, students were asked to complete an informational questionnaire to gather background and demographic data, in order to gain an awareness of their personal history. The survey asked questions in relation to the family’s social status, educational and academic history. Specifically, students were asked close-ended questions on their background such as: parents’/siblings’ educational level, hometown and undergraduate enrollment information (See Appendix B). The researcher used the survey to attain student data and demographic characteristics in conjunction with one-on-one interviews.

**Consent Form**

The consent form (Appendix C) described how the study would be administrated. Students were asked to read, review and agree to the consent form’s guidelines prior to completing the survey and beginning the interview. Once the research participant read
and signed the consent form, the researcher moved forward with executing the interview. The student received a copy of confidentiality agreement, and the original and signed consent form stayed in the researcher’s possession and files.

**Interview Procedure**

Interviews occurred on Loyola’s campus in a pre-reserved conference room. In advance of the interview, a digital recorder was activated, to ensure recording of the dialogue. During the interview, the researcher began with asking a pre-established list of guided interview questions. At any time during the interview, in order to gather descriptive responses if needed, the researcher asked informal interview questions. Informal questions were not pre-planned for each interview and were enacted only when necessary. Specifically, informal questions were asked, to probe students, when their responses were unclear and vague. As the interview came to an end, the student was thanked for their time and involvement.

**Study Site**

The proposed study was conducted at a religiously affiliated private midwestern institution. Founded in 1870, Loyola University Chicago (Loyola) is the nation’s largest Jesuit Catholic University. Loyola is one of 28 Jesuit institutions and universities in the United States. The university has roughly 16,040 students enrolled, which includes undergraduate and graduate students. Located in Chicago, Illinois, Loyola has 10 schools and colleges, and offers 71 undergraduate majors. A few comparable institutions are Fordham University, Loyola Marymount University, Marquette University and University of San Francisco. Loyola is considered a predominately undergraduate, four-
year institution with high research activity (The Carnegie Foundation, 2012). The institution’s mission is “We are Chicago's Jesuit Catholic University-- a diverse community seeking God in all things and working to expand knowledge in the service of humanity through learning, justice and faith” (LUC Mission Vision and Promise).

In the fall of 2010, over 17,000 thousand applications were received, more then 11,000 were admitted, and an estimated 2,000 new students enrolled for the academic year (Loyola University Chicago Office of Institutional Research, 2011). Also, 37.4% of first-time first-years were in the top tenth of their graduating class, while 67.4% were in the top quarter. The university enrolls predominantly Illinois residents at 60%. The institution reported that the Fall 2004 cohort largely graduated within six years (Loyola University Chicago Office of Institutional Research, 2011). During 2011-2012, Loyola reported a six-year graduate at 69.6% rate. The institution reported 9,474 undergraduate students and of those students, 1,014 (10.7%) were Latino/a (Loyola University Chicago Office of Institutional Research, 2011). The ethnic breakdown also included 406 (0.42%) African American, 1,117 (11.7%) Asian, and 6,145 (64.8%) White students. Loyola was chosen at the research site because of its low enrollment of Latino/a students. However, given Loyola’s high percentage of first-generation students, Latino/a first-generation college student research participants were easily secured.

Creswell (2003) suggested that qualitative research should “purposefully select students or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 185). In order to access the Latino/a first-generation college student population, and examine how educational resilience plays a role in the group’s
persistence this study sought to examine, Loyola was deemed appropriate. Loyola’s
diversity is minimal and thus first-generation college students who reach the point of
graduation would be a compelling population to examine in order to gain descriptions of
their educational resilience. The institution reported that during Summer 2012, one-third
of all undergraduates were considered first-generation college students (Loyola
University Chicago First Year Experience, 2012). Also, for 10 years, the Latino/a
enrollment at Loyola had continued to increase, and in the fall of 2012 a record high of
11% of the student population were Latino/a (Loyola University Chicago Office of
Institutional Research, 2012). While other institutions were considered for sites, Loyola
was selected because of its diverse student population and the researcher’s capacity to
attain a meaningful student sample. This institution was also selected because as Loyola
increases the number of Latino/a students enrolled, it should identify ways to support
them to graduation. This study, by concentrating on what factors contributed to Latino/a
first-generation college students persisting to graduation, may provide evidence of what
Loyola can do in the future to assist this increasing population of students.

Data Analysis

The present research study utilized thematic analysis for analyzing the data. The
thematic analysis process included coding and afterward isolating the codes into data sets
for additional examination and explanation (Glesne, 2006). Thematic analysis was
employed in order to organize what was heard and read and identify how Latino/a first-
generation college students make meaning of their educational resilience contextualizing
their identity. Making sense of the stories students told required that the data be 
ruminated on and organized.

In order to describe how Latino/a first-generation college students achieved or 
facilitated educational resilience and to describe it, the process required making 
connections among the stories. As Glesne (2006) stated, putting likeminded pieces of 
students’ stories together leads to developing a coding organizational framework. The 
coding process was approached from an inductive scheme. Patton (1990) reasoned that 
an inductive process is one in which salient categories are able to emerge from the data.

The process began with transcripts, transcribed by the researcher, being read 
multiple times to attain familiarity with participants’ stories. The coding process began 
with developing minor codes and then positioning, within the codes, germane qualitative 
material. Then, in order to narrow and synthesize the data, the transcripts were reread at 
minimum 10 times to identify saturation within the themes and develop major codes.
The goal in developing major codes was to identify major themes and the central ideas 
that participants similarly described. This major code list was closely developed based 
on the academic resiliency concept Protective Factors, discussed in Chapter 2, which are 
identified as Innate, Internal, Non-cognitive and Environment Factors. The final internal 
and external themes identified from the data of each participants, centered from the 
abovementioned. Further, the present study narrowed the themes to position them as 
internal or external resources. This was done in order to clearly analyze how and if a 
student internalized an internal or external resource to achieve or facilitate educational 
resilience and persist to achieve a higher education degree.
Also, the data was assessed with the intention of testing its usefulness and significance (Marshal & Rossman, 1999). This required the researcher to see the usefulness of the data in answering the guiding research questions, and if they are in fact central to the stories that unfolded about the phenomenon that was described by each of the participants. The researcher then acted to closely analyze patterns, students’ transcripts and amalgamate parallel data to confirm and establish its relevancy to the codes and analyze the relationships between codes.

The end of the coding process produced eight overarching themes that were used to subsume the data and a code scheme was developed to analyze the data. The coding process allowed for the thematic-searching process to begin, in order to reflect, make connection, develop insights and write about the data to complete the research process. The data from coding was analyzed to identify emic categories, which are codes from the data not identified in literature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Identifying emic categories are considered useful for qualitative research (Glaser & Strauss, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) because meaning is explored, and “the meaning-making/sense-making/attributional activities that shape action (or inaction)” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 167). The researcher then identified statements in the transcripts regarding how students experienced the phenomenon. Significant statements were listed and a horizontalization of the data was conducted. Each statement was treated with equal worth, in order for the researcher to develop a list of recurring, non-interrelating statements (Creswell, 1998). The statements were then clustered as experiences or significant descriptions in order to develop a thematic list about how student participants
drew on or exhibited educational resilience. The researcher then constructed an overall description of the meaning and essence of educational resilience as described by students.

In order to reach the above-mentioned data analysis, the general template for data analysis utilized the Stevick-Coaizz-Keen (1989) approach to phenomenology. The phases for this analysis begin by having the researcher provide an account of his or her personal experiences of the phenomenon. In this study the researcher’s description, as described above in the bracketing section, was conducted in the form of reflection notes by the researcher. Next, after one-on-one interviews were conducted, field notebook notes were reviewed to process and establish initial direction, ideas and themes that emerged in the data-gathering phase. Specifically, the field notes were reviewed to prompt self-awareness within the researcher, regarding the educational resilience, so as not to bias data from student interviews. Reviewing reflection notes were the initial foundation to separate the researcher’s thoughts from students and to increase impartiality.

**External Auditor**

In addition, an external audit by an impartial reviewer was conducted to review the data collection, analysis, and field notebook for validity. An auditor was solicited to lessen bias in data analysis and for the writing up of findings. Lincoln and Guba (1986) posited, “that part of the audit that examines the process results in dependability judgment, while that part concerned with the product (data and reconstructions) results in a confirmability judgment” (p. 77). The external auditor was asked to examine findings considering the following questions: Are the findings grounded in the data? Are
inferences logical? Is the category structure appropriate? Can inquiry decisions and methodological shifts be justified? What is the degree of researcher bias? What strategies were used for increasing credibility? (Schwandt & Halpern, 1988). The objective of including an external auditor was to establish the study’s validity by examining the study’s research method and results (Creswell & Miller, 2010). The auditor for this context is a female African American first-generation college student with a Ph.D. degree in higher education. This individual is appropriate to serve as auditor for personal and professional knowledge of the student population. The auditor is important to apply a critical eye to the data analysis section in order to compose a findings chapter that is clear, trustworthy and justifiable.

**Limitations**

This study includes several validity and limitation concerns that are discussed in this section. The presentation of the validity and limitations is not meant to put forward a plan for remedying the limitations, but rather to show that the researcher is aware and cognizant of the limitations. Below the three sections that pose possible validity and limitations concerns are presented.

**Generalizability**

A principal limitation is generalizability, which according to Ritchie and Lewis (2006) is the capacity for the findings to be related to the larger population from which the sample is obtained. Because this study examined how educational resilience contributes to Latino/a first-generation college students’ persistence, the findings are primarily generalizable to comparable populations. Another level of limitations occurs in
relation to the institution type, location and Latino/a population on campus. Thus, the findings are not broad in their application because they will specifically relate to Latino/a students at similar institutions. Study results are not applicable to all first-generation college students who attend predominantly White non-religiously affiliated institutions.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) noted that qualitative research is intended to investigate the contextual aspect of a phenomenon and identify themes that emerge from the sample studied, not to construct universal statements or generalized conclusions.

Another form of limitation is that students are juniors and seniors from a four-year institution. As a result, by design the research excludes Latino/a first-generation college students at the two-year institution level. Findings from this study will specifically apply to the population studied and not be relevant among all Latino/a first-generation college students.

Another limitation is that the study only includes Latino/a students attending an institution in the state of Illinois, and as a consequence the study’s conclusions cannot be applied generally to a national group of Latino/a first-generation college students. Therefore, this study does not address possible national differences that might occur among traditional-age Latino/a first-generation college students. Findings are specific to Latino/a first-generation college students from Illinois, thus applying findings nationally will create issues of invalidity.

Students in study were solicited from Loyola University Chicago departments, however some students populations students who may fit the criteria but not be connected to a university office (i.e. commuter students) may not have been solicited to participate.
This creates limitations in the populations that the findings can be applied to and limits understanding to a select group of involved students. Another constraint is that student participants must have cumulative GPA of at least 2.5. The GPA selection was based on requirements and eligibility for graduation. Setting a GPA perimeter, in this present study, resulted in omitting some Latino first-generation college students who may have drawn on or enabled educational resilience. Another limitation is that given that Latino first-generation college juniors and seniors were the populations examined, the voice from educationally resilient first-year and secondary students absent from the present study. As a result, a gap in understanding or expanding educational resilience among first and second year college students remains. The results of this study address the educational experience of junior and senior Latino/a first-generation college students at a private predominantly White religious institution.

Finally, the study was restricted to Latino/a students who self-identify as first-generation college students, which omits those from the population who do not identity with being a first-generation college student. These boundaries constrain the study in its applicability in many forms; however, being aware of the confines allows the researcher to apply findings to an applicable audience and properly make use of findings. The partiality of the study is found not only in relation to the components and population, but also in relation to the researcher.

**Researcher Bias**

Another study limitation is found within the researcher’s own bias about the study. In order to conduct an objective and open study, it is vital to present the cultural
perspective that the researcher executes in judgment and analytical situations (Schultz, 1967). Thus, this section presents the researcher’s philosophy, bias and associations to establish validity within the study and its methodological approach. As an educationally resilient Latina first-generation college graduate and Ph.D. student at the institution where the present study was conducted, the researcher recognized the need for self-awareness regarding academic experiences and biases. The awareness allowed the researcher to move away from using an internal and personal interpretive lens both in interviewing and analyzing findings. As a way to practice what Creswell (2007) described as self-reflexivity, a researcher processing their self-awareness, while conducting the present study a journal was maintained. The journal process allowed the researcher a space to reflect on the goal and vision of this study, while documenting potential concerns or connections to her personal experiences. Journaling allowed the researcher to compartmentalize her Latina first-generation college student experiences and perform the role of the researcher in order to gather the necessary data.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) found that while an individual’s cultural views can influence interview questions and the methods in which they perform, the biases could be tracked and limited within the study. Thus, the researcher in this study explicitly acknowledges that she is considered an educationally resilient student, as a result of being a first-generation college student who has achieved academic success in post-secondary education. As a result of the research being conducted at the same institution at which the researcher is a student, the researcher acknowledges and is aware of institutional or cultural assumptions that can result in relation to how students achieve educational
resilience and persist to graduation. This consciousness allowed the researcher to institute an impartial research protocol, such as the research auditor position described above, to review and provide feedback and analyze findings.

In addition, throughout the study the researcher used a field notebook to process and track thoughts on the research process. Glesne (2003) asserted that a field notebook offers a space to process descriptions of people, places, events, activities and conversations. The field notebook was used to allow the researcher to reflect on judgments that emerged during interview and analysis practices. The notebook held ideas, reflections, notes and impressions that emerged, and is an important tool for allowing the researcher to personally react and manage feelings (Glesne, 2003). These measures worked in conjunction to ensure study reliability and validity.

Validity

In order to validate the reliability of the findings, the researcher provided data rich written descriptions, built trust with participants by sharing personal experiences about being a first-generation college student and triangulated the data. Validity in this study is derived from the thick and dense descriptions that this study attained through in-depth interviews. A criterion for validity in qualitative research is vividness and thoroughness (Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). Vividness entails the presentation of substantial and realistic descriptions (Geertz, 1973). Presentation of rich data contributes to the ability to highlight prominent features of themes (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995), and to expose the essence of the phenomenon without overwhelming the reader with unnecessary aspects (Sandelowski, 1986). In a qualitative study, thoroughness
refers to the sampling and data adequacy in addition to the comprehensiveness of approach and analysis (Popay, Rogers & Williams, 1998), which helps to foster validity. Specifically, in this study, the thoroughness is being attempted by not limiting the number of students interviewed to solicit a fullness and saturation of findings. This is in line with scholars who posited that both completeness (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992) and saturation (Leininger, 1994) discerns thoroughness.

Validating this present study’s findings first involved peer review. This process is described by Lincoln and Guba (1995) as one in which the researcher discusses interpretations and conclusions with someone not directly involved with the research. For the purposes of this study, peer review involved processing with a researcher not involved in the study but familiar with the topic. This allowed for the researcher to be challenged in regards to interpretation and conclusions, and develop insights about the findings.

Research findings were also validated through the implementation of interviews, questionnaire data and memos to in order to do as Cresswell (2013) suggested, which is “shed light on theme or perspective” (p. 251). Using multiple data collection methods and sources resulted in triangulation and provided validity to findings (Cresswell, 2013). Specifically, triangulation occurred in the form of note taking during each interview to document and recall key phrases and themes that consistently emerged. The researcher also wrote memos, following the interviews, and detailed general perceptions and themes that emerged during each interview.
Handwritten memos captured the researcher’s initial and broad presentiments about possible prominent themes uncovered during the interview, in order to associate or disassociate interviews to one another. All qualitative data gathered was cross-referenced against one another to advance and authenticate that similar themes and conclusions were reached.

The qualitative data was cross-referenced against the other data sources to ensure that similar themes and conclusions could be reached. In instances in which the questionnaire data contradicted facts provided in the interviews, the researcher relied on the data provided in the interviews. The researcher also contacted participants to supply missing or clarify unclear demographic and family information. Participants were also contacted to clarify missing information or inconsistency in data.

**Trustworthiness**

Establishing trustworthiness with the participant was the last form of validation verification incorporated by the researcher. Trustworthiness was developed by explaining the study’s purpose and obtaining verbal and written consistent that each research participant wanted to participate, while informing them that their autonomy to answer or not answer questions or remain or withdraw from the study existed at any time. Also, prior to each interview, the researcher informed each participant of her Latina first-generation college student identity and background. The information was shared to establish that the study was positioned from a place of empowerment, empathy and recognition. This strategy was implemented to allow for a dialogue and comfort about the asking and sharing of intimate and personal response about their personal and
As a final way to ensure trustworthiness, participants were informed that they could follow-up with the researcher at any time after completion of the interview to request a transcript or accompanying documents, and process or clarify their responses.

Finally, this study intends to be sensitive to the individual, cultural and group contexts of Latino/a first-generation college students in order to serve and benefit that population. Several researchers suggest that implementing research that is conscious of human, cultural and social frameworks is a criterion for validity (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Munhall, 1994). Such an approach is important in order for the research to serve the people rather than serving the community or policymakers (Lincoln, 1995). The presentation and design consideration of this study worked to assure soundness. The abovementioned methods followed what scholars asserted are necessary to ensure validity (Smith, 1990; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). The proposed study relies significantly on gathering rich and significant descriptions in establishing validity, for it resolves that for this study, legitimacy is established in what Latino/a first-generation college students have to say about educational resilience’s role in their persistence.

**Researcher Bias and Significance of Bracketing**

In order to attain unbiased in-depth interviews, phenomenology’s research design involves the researcher deferring all views about what is real or natural for individuals, and allowing the individual to depict their lived experiences. The researcher in this study recognized that she considers herself an educationally resilient student. More specifically, in relation to the proposed study, the researcher identifies as a Latina first-generation college student who achieved undergraduate and graduate degrees at two
different Texas higher education institutions. The researcher explicitly acknowledges and recognizes that she considers educational resilience an active phenomenon among Latino/a first-generation college students because she believes she has achieved and facilitated the phenomenon.

As a method to lessen research bias, the researcher used a reflection field notebook to process and track thoughts on the research process. Glesne (2003) asserted that a field notebook offers a space to process descriptions of people, places, events, activities and conversations. The field notebook was used to allow the researcher to reflect on judgments that emerged, prior to the interview. The notebook held ideas, reflections, notes, and impressions that emerged, and was an important instrument for the researcher to personally react and manage feelings (Glesne, 2003). These measures together are working in conjunction to ensure the studies’ trustworthiness, and credibility.

As a way to ensure impartiality during interviews, the reviewer reflected and used a journal to record thoughts prior to and at the end of all students’ interviews. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended self-reflection prior to interviews in order for researchers’ bias to emerge prior to student interviews, and to avoid the researcher’s description intertwining with students’ explanations. The researcher acknowledges and is aware of cultural assumptions that can result due to her background and upbringing. Phenomenologists asserted “to experience something in its purest form, you need to bracket, or suspend, any preconceptions or learned feeling that you have about the phenomenon” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 396). Thus, to try to experience and understand the educational resilience phenomenon in its fundamental form, the researcher
bracketed by compartmentalizing the researcher’s personal descriptions of educational resilience. Bracketing aided the researcher in dual forms. First, it allowed the researcher to examine one’s own beliefs and temporarily suspend them (Jasper, 1994), in order to approach the research from a simple perspective, without prejudgments or bias (Cohen & Omery, 1994). As a result, it permitted the researcher to analyze the interview data for themes in a way that is less biased and marred with the researcher’s personal opinions of educational resilience among first-generation college students. This allowed for the researcher to objectively analyze students’ personal words of educational resilience.

A phenomenological study starts with a silent approach (Psathas, 1973). The silence is an attempt for the voice of the subjects to ascend from interviews rather than the opinion or thoughts of the researcher. One way to achieve this in phenomenology is by using Husserl’s philosophy of bracketing, which suspend one’s own beliefs (Koch, 1995). Bracketing contends that the researcher should abandon, be aware or identify personal views about the phenomenon and set them aside prior to interviewing students (Lichtman, 2006; Schwandt, 2007). The rationale for bracketing is to examine the topic from an unprejudiced perspective, and for the researcher to rely on one’s intuition, imagination and universal structures to acquire descriptions of how subjects experienced the phenomena (Creswell, 1998). Although Litchtman (2006) suggested that setting aside assumptions about the phenomenon is difficult and too simplistic an approach, others also contend that the approach is helpful in identifying subjects’ impressions of the phenomenon known to the researcher (Koch, 1995; Lichtman, 2006). Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated that while an individual’s cultural views can influence interview questions
and the methods in which they perform, within a study, biases could be tracked and limited. The latter is especially important because Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated “researchers need to be cautious lest they fail to hear the meaning of what the interviewees have said because their own cultural assumptions get in the way” (p. 29). In order to conduct an objective and open study, it is vital to present the cultural perspective that the researcher executes in judgment and analytical situations (Schultz, 1967).

**Study Summary**

While existing literature described that educational resilience is an active phenomenon in post-secondary students, a significant gap in the literature exists in that literature did not provide sufficient descriptions of the phenomenon from the students’ perspectives. In attaining descriptions, to the researcher offered new insights on how educational resilience occurred for these students at the post-secondary education level. This research identified how educational resilience is present in the lives of Latino/a first-generation college students through their descriptions. As Liddle (1994) has posited, the resilience phenomenon might be best understood through an individual’s account.

Thus, using a qualitative approach, this study on educational resilience attained descriptions about how the phenomenon works within the lives of Latino/a first-generation college students. In order to attain those accounts, in-depth interviews were conducted in order to encourage students to focus, dialogue, and reflect on the phenomenon and disclose their own descriptions. This is especially significant because research, to date, does not specifically examine resilience from the perspective of
examining whether the phenomenon is operational and how from the students’ perspective the concept is achieved or facilitated.
CHAPTER FOUR
PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Chapter Four is designed to provide insight along with deep and holistic narratives about study participants. Ten out of 19 student participant portraits provide context and background about each individual. These select students were chosen because they fulfilled the following criteria: clearly articulated answers to research questions; overlapping, multiple and varied responses to research questions; comparable socio-economic backgrounds; mix of males and females; variety in geography and academic major. Participant portraits present each student’s family background, parents' educational background, and student’s demographics (major, student classification). Also, the portraits are interwoven with students' quotes and personal facts that provide rich descriptions, participant’s voices are in the foreground as they tell their own story. An aggregated table with the demographic information of all the 19 research participants is included to provide a student overview. The chapter concludes with a summary of overarching connections that answer the research questions and segue into the findings explained in chapter five.

Ethnic Group and First-generation Self-identification

A requirement to enrolling in the study was that each participant ethnically identify as Latino/a and as a first-generation college student. In order to validate each participant’s self-identification within the aforementioned categories, each participant
was asked to complete a demographic survey. All 19 research participants identified themselves as Latino/a first-generation college students and some participants identified with their parents’ Latino country of origin. Specifically, Jacquelyn, Ester, Mayra, Emilio, Miguel, Hector and Edgar identified as Mexican. Janet and Alejandro described themselves as Latino, rather than associating with a specific country of origin. Trillion ethnically categorized herself within her mother's Mexican and father's Guatemalan ethnicity. Finally, all students self-selected as being first-generation college students, using the definition provided by the research, which was having parents who did not achieve a baccalaureate degree. The table below provides an individual description all 19 of the student participant demographic background. All student participants, with the exception of Frida and Trillion, selected to use non-pseudonyms.

The participant portraits in this chapter provide context to the demographic information. The portraits are presented here to develop a center from which to understand participants’ internalized approaches to their higher education experiences and how they perceived their persistence. The intention is that the portraits enhance understandings for how these students carried out educational resilience to earn a higher education degree.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Mother's Educational Level</th>
<th>Father's Educational Level</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alejandro</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Boca Raton, FL</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>City, State</td>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>Political Science/International Studies</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>Human Resources Management</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emely</td>
<td>Human Resources Management/Marketing</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilio</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Belvidere, IL</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frida</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacquelyn</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cicero, IL</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerica</td>
<td>Secondary Education - Math</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayra</td>
<td>Business Management/PLSC</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Glendale Heights, IL</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sioux City, IA</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramon</td>
<td>History/Journalism</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Cicero, IL</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasure</td>
<td>Advertising/Public Relations</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillion</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Kirkland, IL</td>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Portraits

Ester

I would probably have to say, definitely coming from the Latino culture,… I feel like a thing that is important to us is hard work, and I think that’s where I got that from. I was told from a very young age you always have to work hard; education is so important… You have to get an education, you have to work hard. Nothing in life is easy. You put in your work today so that tomorrow you have a better life.

Ester was born and reared in Chicago and she is a product of the public school system, where 50% of her senior class graduated from high school. Ester's father and mother are from Mexico, where they attained an 8th grade and 5th grade education, respectively. At the age of 22, Ester is the older of two children. Ester’s brother was a sophomore at another Midwest higher education institution. As a child, Ester grew up in a four-bedroom home, on the Southside of Chicago, with her immediate and large extended family. Ester described her home as being "a first home for a lot of people," who first emigrated from Mexico, which meant living with up to 10 people in the residence at a time. Ester's mother worked in a thrift store as a customer service associate, and for the past 25 years her father was a line cook in a Greek restaurant.

As a senior in high school, Ester applied to Loyola for two reasons, the first being that her high school postsecondary education counselor encouraged her to research postsecondary educational institutions with strong pre-medical programs, and second one of her high school teachers graduated from the institution and suggested she apply. When applying to postsecondary educational institutions, Ester did the process alone because her parents "couldn't help [her]." After being accepted into Loyola, Ester described herself as being “excited” because she would "have the chance to better myself, better my
family and better my community."

However, once enrolled at Loyola, Ester described experiencing cultural estrangement. In her words, she was "freaking out because [she] had never been around so many White people, and [she] was eating this White food and not [her] food, and different things." Ester’s difficult transition led to her planning on transferring institutions, but she changed her mind when the student diversity office offered her a position doing student ethnic identity work. Ester says that the job helped her understand "more about [herself]." She was then able to tell herself "stuff like this happens and you just have to, not get over it, but you gotta work through it, and become stronger and be a better person."

Ester graduated with a degree in Sociology in May 2013, and was a senior student keynote speaker for the institution’s diversity office. She described achieving her postsecondary education degree as "something bigger and better, it's not only for me, it's for my family, it's for brother, it's for my cousins.” After graduation Ester planned to work for a few years and then pursue a Master’s degree.

**Edgar**

If I keep my mouth shut I can’t ask for help, right? And a part of that, I had difficulty, beforehand beginning freshman year, was actually asking for help. And actually asking, hey listen I am going through this experience, I don’t know what this means, I don’t know how I feel about it. Who can I talk to about it? Umm, I think I internalized those feeling(s), during bridge, in telling myself, if you feel alone out here, if you feel scared, perfectly normal, go talk to somebody. Cause if you keep that to yourself who knows what’s going to happen. You are not the only person going through this.

This quote is describing the academic self-awareness that Edgar developing as a
participant in a first-year academic summer bridge program aimed to strengthen students’ learning approaches through academic, social and personnel support. Edgar is a twenty-one-year-old born and reared in Dallas, Texas. He was the only child of a single parent mother. Edgar’s mother and her brother, who he considered a father figure, raised him. Edgar’s mother came to the United States from Oaxaca, Mexico, at 16-years-old, to find work in California. She found work as a food truck cook. She migrated to Texas for better job opportunities and settled there after Edgar was born. Edgar’s mother had no formal education, and for the last 10 years she worked as a housekeeper for a single-family home.

Edgar explained that being a first-generation high school and postsecondary education student “was difficult,” and he shared that having to explain and translate his educational experiences and the process to his mother was a “hardship.” After he was accepted to several higher education institutions across the country, Edgar enrolled at Loyola University Chicago because he previously attended a leadership conference and felt familiar with the campus and city. Edgar was accepted under conditional status, which mandated that he attend an academic bridge program, and pass two academic courses prior to full-time fall enrollment. During the bridge program, Edgar realized he “didn’t have the best reading comprehension,” which made him feel like he was entering Loyola with a “disadvantage.” Despite passing the courses needed to enroll for the fall, when Edgar returned to Dallas with family and friends, he realized the following:

There is no one else to process this experience with, no one to talk to, no one with an outside perspective looking in saying, you are first-generation college student, you are a Latino male, you are not from here, let me talk to and walk you through this experience.
Edgar, in essence felt alone in processing his higher education experience. Edgar relates to his postsecondary educational experience to his mother’s immigrant experience by describing that he is immigrating within the educational environment. He stated that his mother,

Being a first-generation immigrant in the states, being a single parent Mom, being a woman of color, I am sure she wouldn’t define herself as that, being a Latina, being Mexican, the same way, manner, the way she brought that into this space, this United States, American space, I bring that stuff into the classroom. It’s as if I am immigrating into a different country.

The summer prior to his senior year, Edgar attended a prestigious public policy summer leadership program at an Ivy League institution. Edgar is slated to graduate in Spring 2014, with a major in Sociology and a minor in Political Science and Women and Gender Studies. He plans on applying and enrolling in a public policy Master’s or Ph.D. program immediately after graduation.

**Trillion**

I felt like a fighter, I felt like a warrior, and I felt like nobody else understood me. I felt really misunderstood.

Trillion, at age 21, was the oldest of three daughters born to a Mexican mother and a Guatemalan father. Trillion's father worked manual labor jobs and her mother worked as a teacher's aide, while also attending community college to pursue a bachelor's degree. Trillion's mother originally came to the U.S. to learn English, but after meeting Trillion's father she settled in the U.S. to start a family. When Trillion was in the 4th grade, her parents divorced and she moved in with her aunt’s family along with her mother and sisters. For eight years, Trillion and her family lived with their extended
family. Trillion's secondary education experience encompassed going to school in a one-story school building, which housed the elementary, junior high and high school. She was reared in the rural community of Kirkland, Illinois, or as she described she was "held hostage there." Trillion described Kirkland as being "small towns, small thoughts" with people who "couldn't see beyond that corn." She was one of five people from her senior class of 46 to leave and enroll into a higher education institution. Trillion said she always had aspirations to attend a postsecondary educational institution, as her parents consistently emphasized the importance of higher education.

Accepted into Loyola University Chicago, on a conditional acceptance, the summer before her first-year, Trillion was required to complete a summer bridge program and pass two academic courses before enrolling in the fall as a full-time student. As a first year student, Trillion struggled with academics. She remarked on the limited resources offered at her high school, which she said "had no AP courses, they had like a total of five teachers teaching, like I don't know how many subjects. Resource wise they were extremely limited. They had no extra-curricular activities, and there was no ACT prep." Trillion stated that in high school she "did not take notes," therefore when she enrolled into a postsecondary educational institution she had "no time management skills, no note taking skills."

As a postsecondary education student, Trillion commuted from an apartment she shared with her mother, and two sisters. When Trillion was accepted to Loyola, her family moved to Chicago as a way to keep the family together, and allow her the opportunity to attend postsecondary institution. Trillion stated that when her parents
divorced she and her mother, "teamed up to raise her sisters." Today, she and her mother, who is enrolled in a local community college, worked on homework together at their dining room table "until 3 or 5 o'clock in the morning." Trillion majored in Sociology with a minor in Music and she is slated to graduate in Spring 2014. After graduation, Trillion plans on enrolling into a Ph.D. program in Sociology.

**Emilio**

I guess you know a great work ethic… Just knowing that I was the first one in my family to do something like this…I feel like there was also, not too much, but there was a little bit of pressure too, cause I wanted to make my parents proud and everything. And I knew I needed to do well and get my degree. I suppose that those qualities helped. I think that I picked up that quality up from my father because he’s always been a really hard worker. I just think that part of physically working, he’s always been a hard worker, and I feel like some of that got transferred to me. I feel like that did help me academically as well.

Emilio was 22 years old, and called himself someone who was "really loving school." Emilio's father was from Coahuila, Mexico and his mother from Guerrero, Mexico. His parents came to the U.S. as children, and met in high school. They obtained citizenship through the amnesty program accessible during the 1980s. While his parents grew up in the urban city of Chicago, they moved the family outside the city to a suburb, Belvedere, to provide their children with particular educational opportunities. His parents were fluent in both English and Spanish. Emilio’s mother worked as an interpreter and enrolled in a postsecondary institution, but withdrew without achieving a degree to become a stay-at-home mom to his younger brother and sister. Emilio’s father, at 18-years-old, began working on a factory assembly line, and today serves as a division supervisor in that same company.
Emilio stressed that his parents played a huge role in his pursuit of a postsecondary education degree. As a commuter student, Emilio achieved an economics degree in May 2013, and immediately after graduation he started a job with a non-profit legal aid agency. Emilio said that when talking to his dad about achieving his degree he "realized that through the fruits of his [dad’s] hard physical labor, [Emilio’s] first job will be an office job, not something that [he would] have to physically labor to acquire income." Emilio said that from a young age, his family placed the expectation to go to attend a postsecondary educational institution, as "the goal had always been to attend school." He felt strongly that "without [his] parent's [he] wouldn't have been able to do it."

Emilio's said that his father a drove 1994 Dodge truck, which is "falling apart" in order for he and his younger brother to attend a postsecondary educational institution. Emilio explained that while his parents “could have easily spent money on themselves and said no you are not going to college we can't afford it," they instead worked hard every day to ensure he and his siblings could enroll and persist. Emilio plans to work for a few years after graduating, in spring 2013, and then apply to law school.

Janet

I know that I am privileged and maybe it’s the fact that I realize that I have opportunity. Even though I had a bad experience and I had a lot of roadblocks, I am privileged to have the opportunity to go to a university, to have the opportunity to study.

Janet was a 21-year-old social work major from Cicero, Illinois. She was the youngest of four children born to Mexican immigrants, who became U.S. citizens in the 1990s. Janet says that because her brothers did "lots of crazy things" when they were
younger her parents were strict with her and her older sister. Raised in the Chicago area, Janet attended a predominately Latino public school, which she describes as not being known for its academic rigor, and where according to Janet “the average ACT score for students was 16.” She described her background as coming from a "poor high school” and from a neighborhood where she could "say what gang is on that street, what gang is over here, and [knowing] what colors not to wear." Janet credits her older sister with encouraging her to apply and enrolling into a post-secondary institution immediately after graduating from high school.

Janet's sister earned her degree from Loyola University Chicago and was enrolled in medical school. Initially, Janet planned on enrolling into a community college because she did not believe she could be successful in a four-year postsecondary institution. Janet described her first year at Loyola as "very difficult" because she felt like a four year post-secondary institution was not for her and "someone like [her] couldn't do it, [she did not] know anyone else who [had] a degree." However, she stated that her sister persistently told her she "could do more."

As a cross-country runner, Janet was recruited to another Midwest institution, and she ultimately selected Loyola based on the large number of major options. Although Janet was excited to attend Loyola, she said that she thought, "[she] got accepted because [she] was a woman and [she] was Hispanic and they gave [her] a hand." Upon becoming a senior Janet said that she, her mother and sister would laugh at her early academic distress because she would be graduating soon.

As Janet reflected on her academic experience, she said that her five nieces
contributed to her achieving her degree. She wanted to show her nieces that although higher education was "a privilege" attaining a degree was "possible and it's not hard." She felt like the "biggest problem of why [she] thought it was so hard is because [she] didn't know anyone else who did it." However, for her nieces she wanted them to say "my aunts went to college, no biggie, I can go to college." As a senior, Janet took graduate courses and applied and was accepted to a Master's in Social Work program. She began the master's in social work program immediately following graduation. Janet also planned on applying to attain a Ph.D. in Social Work after receiving her master's degree.

**Miguel**

Pretty much, just like give it all your best and kind of just be proud of what you do. I am proud of being a hard worker and doing things to its completion and to the best of my ability and I am always excited to work hard in order to be proud of that.

Born in California, 21 year-old Miguel was reared in Sioux City, Iowa. His parents divorced when he was 11 years old and he lived with his father. Miguel was the oldest of seven siblings from his parents’ second marriages, and also of his two siblings from his parent's union. Miguel’s younger brother was attending a four-year institution in Iowa and his younger sister was a junior in high school. Miguel's parents were from Jalisco, Mexico. His mother was from the city and his dad was from the coastal area. Miguel’s father grew up in poverty, and his mother grew up within a large lower-middle class family. Miguel's parents came to the U.S. as undocumented immigrants and met while working in the farm fields of California. His parents moved to Iowa, after being told by his mother’s brother that there was ample work in the area and that immigration enforcement was minimal. For the last 12 years, Miguel’s father worked as a factory
worker in a cookie company and his mother was a seasonal worker.

Miguel described his approach to applying to a post-secondary institution as carrying it out "on his own." He described feeling that his parents didn’t "understand" a postsecondary education. In junior high, Miguel said he became aware that he would have a "hard time in college" because of his parents. When he "talked college with his parents, they kind of were like, yeah, that sounds exciting as opposed to saying let’s look up some college right now.” What do you want to learn? What do you want to study?” Miguel repeatedly stated that he was on his own when pursuing a postsecondary degree.

Miguel's exposure to postsecondary education and culture came from his peers’ parents. In high school Miguel participated in postsecondary educational institutional tours and a pre-medical camp with a friend and his friend’s father. Also, another family friend took Miguel on a college tour across the Midwest. Attending a private Catholic, predominately White high school, Miguel described himself as an "ambitious fellow” who got a “good ACT score,” therefore enrolling into a postsecondary educational institution was an “obvious” and attainable next step. While working to attain his postsecondary degree, Miguel shared that “the whole failure idea was definitely a thought that was in the back of [his mind] because [he] was doing all this.” However, he also shared that “so for [him, he] may not have it, [his] parents may not know what college is like, and being a first-generation may be tough…[he couldn’t] dwell on the frustration.” Instead Miguel said that his approach towards working on attaining his degree was one of “working hard and kind of just being proud about it.” A history major on a pre-medical track, Miguel was on track to graduate in Spring 2014 and planned on taking a year off
before applying for medical school.

Jacquelyn

Seeing my family so motivated, so driven, so, you know, proud of themselves. Like, that’s probably, as a first-generation, I think that’s what gets you through a lot the struggles that maybe other people can’t relate to, because at the end of the day we don’t have no –[one] to like guide us through it.

Born and raised in Long Beach, California, 22 year-old Jacquelyn moved to a small town two hours from the city of Chicago the summer before her senior year of high school. She was the second child of three children, and had an older sister and younger brother. Jacquelyn's parents were both from Mexico. With a junior high education, Jacquelyn’s dad came to the U.S., on his own, at the age of 17. Her mother was brought to the U.S. at three years old and was reared in the U.S. where she received a high school diploma. Jacquelyn's parents each worked two jobs to support the family. Her father was employed as a cook and bartender, and her mother worked at a local public library and church.

While in high school, Jacquelyn’s mother encouraged her to enroll in the Upward Bound program, a program she credited with developing her higher education aspirations. During her junior year, after a campus visit, Jacquelyn applied and was admitted to Loyola University Chicago. While, Jacquelyn's mother was very supportive of her higher education aspirations, her father was more hesitant about her attending postsecondary institution. Jacquelyn defined her father as "typical Mexican father," who told her, "[she] needed to learn how to cook beans before leaving home to go to college." More specifically, her father was concerned at the prospect of Jacquelyn taking out loans, and
the financial obligations that she would incur. Jacquelyn's father strongly encouraged her to attend the local community college. However, after having graduated high school a semester early, and having attended a community college for a semester, Jacquelyn believed attending a four-year institution was the best decision for her.

Jacquelyn majored in Social Work and credits her major classes with exposing her to studies about the low percentage of Latino/as who graduate with a postsecondary education degree, and instilling in her the passion to persist. She considered her degree a great accomplishment, and felt driven to give back to her community. Jacquelyn strongly believed that the fact that she enrolled into a postsecondary institution was not her own accomplishment because she felt, “if [she] didn’t have people helping me, [she] probably would not be here at Loyola, or maybe [she would be at] a community college.”

Jacquelyn graduated in Spring 2013 and aspired to attain a Master’s degree in Social Work.

Mayra

I feel like whatever I give up now is going to help my younger siblings, so that when they go through the same thing it won’t be as tough on them. So, like whenever I feel horrible, about like oh I didn’t hang out as much with friends, or I didn’t go out as much as I wanted to, I think back and I am like, well like I gave up these things but my parents gave up a lot like when they came here. They left their families, had to start from scratch, like that’s probably a bigger deal than me not hanging out with friends for a couple years while I am in school.

Mayra was 23 years old, and was the oldest of four children. Her claim to being the oldest was being a minute older than her fraternal twin sister, who attended another Midwest postsecondary institution. Mayra was from Glendale Heights, a suburb of Chicago. In addition to her twin sister, she had a younger sister, who is in high school and
a brother, who is in junior high school. Mayra’s parents were both from Zacatecas, Mexico and grew up within improvised circumstances, and neither one of them attended formal schooling. Because of her parent’s educational experiences, Mayra described her parents as having “no educational expectations or standards” for their children. Mayra's father worked as a waiter at a restaurant and her mother worked at a fast-food restaurant to provide for their family.

As a high school student Mayra said she "always planned to go to school." In planning for her life after high school, most of Mayra’s peers made plans to get a job, rather than enrolling and attending a postsecondary educational institution. Although Mayra was eager to attend a postsecondary educational institution, her parents were not supportive of the idea. One day during her senior year, Mayra’s mother told her and her twin sister that despite their academic success “the family did not have the money to pay for college degrees and [they] could not attend.”

Ignoring her parents’ wishes, Mayra applied to several Illinois universities and was accepted to Loyola University Chicago and made plans to leave home to attend a postsecondary educational institution. Confused as to why Mayra would apply to university away from home and how she would support herself, Mayra's parents worked to persuade her to postpone or to decline acceptance into the institution. Mayra, described herself as a “stubborn” person who told them "the same way you keep working when you need to make that bill payment, like a bill or something, you don’t take a day off, like I am not going to take a day off." Once enrolled into Loyola University Chicago, Mayra majored in political science and business management with a minor in economics. She
said that one of the appeals for her wanting to attend Loyola was the “low numbers of Latinos.” Mayra wanted to attend Loyola because she felt that the lack of student diversity would “prepare” her for higher-level educational and professional environments.

Priding herself with being the oldest child in the family, Mayra sees her work towards a degree as a learning experience to help her siblings achieve a postsecondary educational degree. She said working towards her degree caused her to “realize how much [she] wanted [her] degree, and realize if [she] did want it as much as [she] thought [she] did it wasn’t going to be something easy and that [she] was going to need to give some things up.” Mayra graduated in May 2013 and was excited to attend her twin sister's graduation in June of that same year. Mayra planned on working for two to three years before applying to law school.

Hector

The blue collar work that my parents and my family does; I just figured how difficult is it to sit here and read a book. I think it’s a hundred times more difficult to be working in construction and be tired and be sore and have a bad back. And you have to there is no question, you have to get up and go to work or else bills don’t get paid and we don’t get fed.

Born and raised in Chicago, Hector was the oldest of three children born to childhood sweethearts, who emigrated from a small ranch town outside of Jalisco, Mexico. The 23 year-old was reared in a predominantly Spanish speaking home by a stay-at-home mother and father who works as drywall technician. Hector's parents moved to the Midwest in order for his father to work in the drywall industry with his mother's brothers, which was the family business. Hector’s father worked in construction seven
days a week, completing 12-to 15 hour shifts. He described seeing his father working in that environment and seeing the effort he put into that type of work as one that “motivated him academically.”

While neither of his parents had a high school diploma, Hector credited his mother’s efforts to help him and his siblings with their homework, as the reason they all graduated from high school at the top of their senior class. Hector finds it "remarkable" that despite his mother’s lack of a United States education, or having a high school education, she was able to academically aid and support him and his siblings. Hector's younger sister graduated with an Associate’s degree and was enrolled in a four-year institution, and his brother graduated from high school and received a full scholarship to a Midwest four-year state institution.

During his senior year of high school, Hector did not plan on attending postsecondary educational institution. One reason for his lack of postsecondary education planning was his behavioral trouble at school during his senior year of high school. Hector’s behavior caused him to not be on positive terms with his school counselor or high school dean. He received minimal to no support from high school officials. Hector stated that throughout his secondary education experience he was in and out of trouble, but was still academically successful, which was reflected in him maintaining a 3.2 G.P.A. Hector’s application to Loyola came by way of him picking up a local newspaper, which had a free Loyola admission application inside.

Although Hector was excited about attending Loyola and he felt accomplished, paying for tuition was a constant worry as he was undertaking his higher education
degree. Hector lived at home while obtaining his undergraduate degree and worked throughout the experience to support not only his own expenses, but also his family’s expenses. Hector majored in accounting at Loyola, and after five years he graduated. A few weeks prior to graduation, Hector was offered a full-time accounting job at a local drywall company as a junior accountant. Upon receiving that news that he would be working for a drywall corporation as a white-collar employee, Hector felt immense pride. Hector was pleased that, with his postsecondary education degree, he would remain connected to his upbringing because his Dad “for over 20 years, worked manual labor installing and removing dry wall.” Hector resolved that he would have an “extra level of understanding about the business” because of his dad's work experience.

Alejandro

I think I picked up this thing about hard work watching my mother work, literally from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., literally for 365 days.

At age 22, Alejandro was the oldest of three children born to Mexican immigrants, who immigrated to the United States as teenagers. His father attained a high school diploma from a Chicago area school, while his mother achieved a sixth grade education. Describing his parents as working-class, Alejandro's father worked in a restaurant and did part-time work in real estate, while his mother was a housekeeper. Alejandro had two younger sisters, a 20 year-old who attended a four-year Southern university, majoring in Criminal Justice and Journalism, and a 11-year-old sister. Alejandro was born in a suburb of Chicago, but when he was six years old, Alejandro’s parents moved the family to Boca Raton, Florida, seeking better educational opportunities and a less violent environment for their children. Alejandro's family
consistently emphasized the importance of attaining a postsecondary degree education. At the age of 14, Alejandro's father died of cancer and his mother took over as head of the household to provide for the family. He described his mother as working “365 days a week,” all day, to support the family after his father's death, in order to “pay the mortgage” and minimize change in he and his siblings’ lives.

Applying to a postsecondary institution and attaining a degree was always in Alejandro's future plans. He described, “his parents above anything stressed getting an education to live a better life.” Given that Alejandro's parents did not have a higher education, his parents stressed that education was essential and education meant progressing in life. He stated, that he “was determined on moving ahead with [his] education, [he] wanted to get somewhere, and [he wanted] to get somewhere still.” Graduating from high school, Alejandro felt “prepared and confident in his educational ability” and academic portfolio.

Alejandro initially wanted to attend Illinois State University, but due to his mother's single parent income and the financial aid package that the school offered, attending that university was not feasible. Thus, the summer after his high graduation, Alejandro, completed his unfinished Loyola University Chicago application and submitted it. At the same time he enrolled into a community college, and two weeks after submitting his Loyola University Chicago application he received a phone call of acceptance from the institution. After wrestling with his mother about returning to Chicago and figuring out the financial obligations, three weeks after receiving the decision, Alejandro flew on his own to Chicago and attended first-year orientation.
Upon reflecting on enrolling into Loyola, as an 18 year old, Alejandro recalled what a influence his mother had on him and how she said that she did not “want [him] to do this kind of work, [she wants him] to move ahead and get somewhere in life and be something more than what [she is].” At Loyola University Chicago, Alejandro majored in Criminal Justice and Pastoral Leadership and graduated magna cum laude, in Spring 2013. After graduation Alejandro attended basic training for The United State Marine Corps. Alejandro eventually plans on attending law school.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present demographic information about all 19 student study participants, but primarily to describe 10 of the students, as a way to situate the context and findings that are presented in the subsequent chapter. This chapter details the participants’ inner dialogue, views and perspectives and lays the foundation for understanding how these students achieved educational resilience. As explained in chapter two, Latino/a first-generation college students are profiled in literature as having a multitude of deficits, which positions them to withdraw or fail out of higher education. However, this research identifies how some individuals from the Latino/a first-generation college student population internalize external and internal resources to approach their post-baccalaureate experience in order to achieve a higher education degree.

In summarizing the five men and women profiled in this research study, of the 19 total study participants, all identified as Latino/a and first-generation college students. Altogether, the participants expressed growing up in predominantly Latino households and being U.S. citizens, while commonly holding that their parents were Latino/a first-
generation immigrants. On the whole, there were no differences among study participants related to sex or other demographic identities. In fact, all of these study participants consistently held similar or related voices in describing their accounts about how they achieved educational resilience. In this study there were those participants profiled in this chapter who had parents who directly communicated their support for achieving a higher education degree. Also, there were study participants, as in the case of Hector and Mayra, who described having parents who showed their support by compelling themselves to provide monetary support. All students, regardless of sex, age or economics imparted that they felt overwhelmingly compelled to achieve their degree, and once enrolled they felt equally supported by their parents to persist and achieve educational resilience. Beyond parents, as postsecondary education students, these participants shared that external and internal resources such as peers, faculty, ethnic background and their identity as Latino/a first-generation college students facilitated their ability to be educationally resilient. Bearing this in mind, it is reasonable to understand that all 19 participants were successful in obtaining their undergraduate degree.

In the impending chapter five, findings are isolated and analyzed to outline the major themes identified from the research that answer the study’s research questions. All student interviews were analyzed to obtain, develop, and validate the themes, but the 10 students whose narratives were presented here are used for concrete and specific examples. Six themes emerged as having contributed to Latino/a first-generation college students’ educational resilience attending a predominately White religious higher education institution: (1) first-generation status; (2) parent's work ethic (hard work); (3)
culture; self-identifying as at-risk; (4) upward mobility; (5) faculty; and (6) peers. Bronfenbrenner's (1993) Ecological Framework is utilized to show how various environments bi-directionally influence these students’ to achieve educational resilience. Specifically, the thematic findings provide an assessment for how these students attained a post-secondary degree by facilitating or achieving educational resilience while internalizing external and internal resources.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

The present study explores a research gap in the literature focused on the association between Latino/a first-generation college students’ educational resilience, and the internal and external resources they utilize to demonstrate persistence. This study’s intent is to provide the post-secondary education community with qualitative data to inform and enhance initiatives, programs and policies, and foster advances that will support this population’s persistence. By considering how Latino/a first-generation college students demonstrate educational resilience, new inferences about this population’s ability could potentially be developed. Educational resilience research is valuable because the core of the theory suggests that all individuals have the capacity, despite risk factors or circumstances, to make positive and healthy academic developments. Findings from participants’ responses to research questions provide direction and salient distinctions about the internal perspectives and processes that Latino/a first-generation college students utilize to demonstrate educational resilience.

Particularly, this present study’s questions examine the ways in which these students apply internal and internalize external resources to demonstrate educational resilience. The final question examines how Latino/a first-generation college students internalize their first-generation identity, which is often described from a deficit perspective, to demonstrate educational resilience. By studying how Latino/a first-
generation college students demonstrate educational resilience, the intent is to assist educators who face what Rooney (2002) described as the Latino/a college persistence problem.

The analysis of findings is presented by situating the findings within principal research questions that they answer. Next, the study’s results are related to literature. Lastly, the ways in which Latino/a first-generation college students draw on internal resources and internalize external resources to demonstrate educational resilience is connected to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model. The connection to theory is presented to contextualize the various environmental systems students draw from to attain educational resilience.

**Question 1: How and what internal resources do Latino First-generation college students draw on to demonstrate educational resilience?**

**First-generation Identity Influence**

A core component to facilitating educational resilience among these Latino/a college students was positioning their first-generation college student identity in two ways. The first is in attaining clarity regarding their academic deficits and preparedness in connection to their first-generation identity. The next involves interpreting their first-generation college student identity as an autonomous virtue. Latino/a students embraced their first-generation college student identity, which took them from a place of vulnerability to attain educational resilience. This allowed them to develop an internal direction for how they could academically persist.
Self-identifying Academic Deficits

Within this study, 18 participants described that self-identifying academic risk factors was an internal resource that allowed them to proactively seek academic support as college students. Trillion openly described her feelings in self-identifying her academic deficits:

I was mad. I was mad because I was like, my whole life my goal was to get to college and now that I am here I am going to fail. ‘Cause I don't know how to take notes. I barely know how to read the textbooks. This is gibberish to me. I would go to class and I was like, “Everyone looks smart.” I thought I was the stupidest person in the classroom. I was like, “I am too dumb. I am dumb and I am really dumb compared to all these other students.” ‘Cause people were like “I went to this college prep school.” And people were like, “Where are you from?”, and I was like, “I don't want to talk about that right now.” I was really embarrassed, by realizing how dumb I was compared to everyone else, and I was really mad.

Trillion described what many of the other students described as developing a self-awareness of their academic deficits, which was a painful process that led to pessimistic feelings about her academic ability. Some students described developing a negative inner dialogue such as “feeling dumb” and “not knowing.” Grace, as well as some other study participants, described struggling academically as an under- and upper-class student, being placed on academic probation and having to temporarily withdraw from the institution because of her academic deficits. Many of these students realized that something was “wrong” academically and that they were not critically thinking or academically performing at college-level.

As study participants continued on their academic journey, self-identifying academic deficits led to three important thoughts: “What am I supposed to be doing?,” “fear,” and “anger.” Study participants explained that these three internal thoughts
manifested views that they would not achieve their degree. Although within development theory such language can be taken as evidence of crisis at a transitional phase (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1984), for these study participants, what transpired was a process of converting their negative internal feelings into constructive behaviors. Although Trillion was angry when realizing her academic deficits, she, along with other study participants, expressed that it helped her internalize an academic cognizance, which enabled her educationally made her a “fighter academically.”

Edgar nicely described how these students developed into a “fighter academically.” He talked about his academic discrepancies and how self-awareness influenced him academically:

> It really sort of, like, got me down. I was very, like, disappointed. ‘Cause I felt like I can’t, one, I don’t have the best reading comprehension… In like a good way, bad way, I’m like every other student that’s coming into your office or whatever resources that you need. I just have really particular needs that I need you to cater to me specifically. And if you can’t do that then you got to let me know up front so that I can go talk to someone else that can. You can take that personally. I don’t care, that’s fine. I just need, I’m just trying to get ahead in life.

In direct response to identifying academic deficits, Edgar developed an assertive and proactive attitude about reaching out to people and resources to draw upon and demonstrate educational resilience. Accordingly, some students enacted their educational resilience by challenging the services given to first-generation college students and were direct about approaches that were helpful to them. They developed a definite plan and perspective about their needs and verbalized them to those in positions of influence and support.
Edgar’s educational resilience came from his ability to develop proactive and empowering behaviors while addressing his self-identified academic deficits. His words are a strong example of how students explained that overcoming academic deficits propelled them to be self-seeking about those they approached for support.

Students shared that their academic deficits were not unlike other academic issues that other students encountered, thus it was their responsibility to solicit protective resources that would enable their academic persistence. Among these students, their educational resilience developed from their ability to identify academic deficits, and react intentionally and proactively. These students internalized their anger for their academic deficits into a desire to stay, struggle, overcome and persist. Specifically, they were able to look beyond the fear and change that feeling to academic self-assurance because they believed that knowing their deficits allowed them to gain focus on what they academically needed. They were then able to seek out a variety of supports to enhance their academic ability, such as positive internal talk, and reaching out to professors, advisors and peers.

Edgar described that while feeling academically underprepared was not comfortable, he was drawn towards “growing” within the experience. This speaks to participants’ comments that in self-identifying academic deficits, they believed they were progressing towards academic preparedness. The reason for this is that they developed self-confidence that enabled them to self-identify and intentionally address their academic needs. They felt empowered and thus demonstrated educational resilience.
Connection to literature. Like the research conducted by Arellano and Padilla (1996) on the academic resilience of 30 Latino/a undergraduate students at selective institutions, a majority of these research participants related their educational resilience to personal abilities. For example, students stated that their “drive to succeed” was related to being “stubborn” in refusing to give-up when encountering challenges. The present study corroborates Arellano and Padilla’s (1996) finding and advances that educational resilience is also related to personal abilities such as self-identifying academic deficits. Rather than choosing to blame their academic struggles on a lack of academic ability, these students became stronger in the face of challenges, and used self-identifying their academic deficits to demonstrate educational resilience.

The current study describes how Latino/a students utilize self-identifying as academic deficits to motivate themselves and move into a direction toward educational resilience. In the resilience literature, Morales (2008A) established that resilient individuals have the ability to convert potential risk factors into an affirmative dynamic. Such research is important because it can reframe how “at-risk” populations are viewed. Catterall (1998) posited that observing alienated adolescent students who were able to academically transition in a positive direction is important because it can challenge the purveyance of educational system misperceptions of students’ ability and commitment. Motivational research has identified those intrinsic and extrinsic resources as forms of inspiration (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; 2000b).

These findings connect to Bandura’s (1999) self-efficacy theory that beliefs influence people in various ways, for individuals have the power to enact human agency
by being self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating. This research also advances self-efficacy research, like Phinney and Haas’ (2003) mix-method study ethnic minority (mostly Latino/a) freshman students which examined how they coped with stress to academically persevere, despite risks related to their first-generation status. This present study’s findings advance that students retained commitment to achieving their degree through self-identifying academic deficits, which allowed them to develop positive self-efficacy because they were cognizant of their academic limitations. They were then able to be academically deliberate, which developed within them a positive self-efficacy they drew upon to achieve educational resilience. This present study advances that Latino/a first-generation college students described drawing on a range of at-risk factors that helped sustain their educational resilience such as, “lack of critical thinking,” and/or “low reading comprehension skills.”

**First-generation College Student Status**

As discussed above, while students developed an advantageous self-awareness about their academic deficits, which most likely originated form their first-generation identity, they did not develop animosity or cynicism towards their identity. In fact, all 19 participants described that this external identity cultivated into an internal resource that contributed to their educational resilience. Participants explained that they linked their first-generation identity to having the ability to be autonomous, and the pride in academically working to represent such a group.

Miguel’s response directly explains participants’ opinion about first-generation status’ association with autonomy:
I feel pretty proud that I was doing it on my own and I was pretty excited that parents didn't control what I was doing. I was always pretty excited about going out and obviously once you are out there, then that's when you feel alone. You are excited you are out there. It was always for me, like, I knew I was a first-generation but not about that name. But I did realize that I had a special opportunity, and [it] meant also my parents weren't going to be controlling everything that I did. So for me just having fun was kind of my thing and being proud of it.

Embracing this identity through a sense of autonomy, for these participants, came from positively embracing that they were labeled first-generation college students because their parents did not attain a post-secondary degree. Rather than placing this status in the negative, all of these students constructively internalized that they had a unique academic opportunity to explore, make important decisions, and create a life unlike their parents’ or others in their community. This produced a passion and commitment to “keep going,” “want more,” or “take advantage of the opportunity.” The fact they were even given the first-generation college student label empowered them to demonstrate educational resilience because they identified that status was rare and difficult to attain. In doing so, students embodied that they were academically qualified and exceptional students who could carry out the academic work to fully attain the title by graduating.

In addition to internalizing that their first-generation identity gave them autonomy, which allowed them to feel academically capable, these students also positioned the identity as a point of pride. As explained by Miguel, Edgar, and other students, they were proud because there were few of them in class and on campus, and while being a Latino/a first-generation student was difficult they felt privileged to be “those students.” Many of these students described that being a first-generation college
student was a “special opportunity” and an experience that “not everyone can have,” that they felt “privileged” and “excited” to self-identify with this group.

While many of the students described feeling alone as first-generation college students, they described that the solitude also motivated them to persist. Miguel related his pride to immigrants attaining their citizenship and that like them, he had to “submit the paperwork” to become part of that population and demonstrate educational resilience. Study participants internalized academic responsibility, and embraced the academic struggles that came with their first-generation identity. They felt empowered and capable of undertaking their academic endeavors. Students’ used that sense of pride to demonstrate their educational resilience to persist in order for them to one day reflect back what they had done to fully represent first-generation college student graduates.

**Connection to literature.** A moderate amount of previous research confirms findings in this study: that both verbal and non-verbal behaviors, and trust parents express in and about their academic decisions and ability empowers Latino/a first-generation college students to persist in college (Ceballo, 2004). Students in this study shared that they value that their parents had minimal guidance to offer about their academic career trajectory because it brought a sense of independence. Participants saw autonomy as part of the first-generation experience that they embraced, echoing Morales’ (2000) study, which found that Latino/a parents nurtured autonomy within their children by allowing them to be independent and self-directed.

The current study expands on Morales’ (2000) findings by providing rich detail about how Latino first-generation college students interpret and explain their autonomy.
For example, students described that the self-sufficiency they received led them into a direction of focus and being proactive about achieving their goals. Research confirms Miguel’s description that the first-generation college student status was freeing and limitless, and students’ perception that parents’ limited to no involvement in college was not adverse to their academic success. This finding is consistent with Strage’s (1999) quantitative study of Latino, White, and Asian American self-efficacy, which identified that these students maintained a strong confidence to persist despite their self-awareness of their family background. In the present study, their beliefs about being a first-generation college student may have functioned to allow these Latino/a students to stimulate confidence in their academic tasks, and persist through challenges. These findings enhance previously mentioned research (e.g., Arellano & Padilla, 1996) on the importance of parental support and encouragement to Latino/a educational resilience by showing that for Latino first-generation college students, their need to enact independence because their parents limited experience with post-secondary education builds within them a resourcefulness that they accept. Students embrace and view their first-generation status as a form of internal support and encouragement from parents. These findings challenge Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini’s (2004) following conclusions:

Compared to their peers with highly educated parents, first-generation students are more likely to be handicapped in accessing and understanding information and attitudes relevant to making beneficial decisions about such things as the importance of completing a college degree, which college to attend and what kinds of academic and social choices to make while in attendance. (p. 252)
This research has identified that students draw on their first-generation student characteristic to identify the importance of completing the degree, how to complete the degree and overall navigate the postsecondary educational institutions process and culture. This research specifically advances that Latino/a first-generation college students are not completely hindered by their identity. In fact, the findings identified that Latino/a first-generation college students are enabled and informed by their characteristics about the significance of completing their degree, and the types of academic and social choices they should make.

These findings establish that for these Latino first-generation college students, while their parents do not give advice about academics, navigating the institution or engaging with campus culture, their parent’s lack of post-secondary education experience remains a guiding source. Latino/s college students who hold the first-generation college characteristic demonstrate educational resilience by placing into perspective how they should approach their academic journey. Their approach is one of independence, and belief their capabilities and decisions. This, in turn, provides students with the self-efficacy that they can persist and allows them to demonstrate educational resilience.

In general, until now, the literature lacked substantiation regarding the impact of the first-generation characteristics among Latino/a’s educational resilience. The data from these interviews reinforces that it can establish a framework from which to approach the postsecondary education experience. For example, it tells Latino first generation college students what their parents can offer and any gaps that exist that they need to address to
demonstrate educational resilience. For some Latino/a college students who hold the first-generation identity, it is a positive internal resource they utilize to persist.

**Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity is another internal positive resource that 18 Latino/a first-generation college student participants identified as facilitating educationally resilience. Participants explained that part of what led to educational resilience were internal issues related to race and discrimination regarding their ethnic group. Educational resilience among this group spawned from the association between students’ Latino/a ethnic identity and postsecondary education, and how it was positively internalized. Jacquelyn’s comment illustrates participants’ ethnic group considerations:

> I think that my parents always made [being proud of ethnicity] their goal, especially now, within the last few years. When people say “illegal immigrants,” my parents really show me that we are a culture of hard working people. And even though there are people who don't want us here, we have a right to be here, especially because we are citizens. My Mom is a citizen, my dad is a resident and he has rights. They've always showed me their struggles when they were younger and made it a point to show us that we should be proud of our culture and heritage and use that to motivate us to get far.

When participants spoke of their ethnic group, their capacity to demonstrate educational resilience was in part initiated from reflecting on others’ perceptions of their ethnic group. They described that attaining their degree was a form of social justice for their ethnic group because they wanted to show the group’s educational capability. Study participants mentioned that immigration, employment, and social and political struggles that Latinos endured as an ethnic group ignited a passion within them to achieve a college degree. Participants consistently spoke about their desire to modify people’s
perception of Latino/as by achieving their degree. They wanted to prove to those beyond their ethnic group that from struggle, discrimination, judgment and stereotype, academic success was possible.

Further, the participants were able to demonstrate educational resilience because achieving a postsecondary education degree was a way for Latinos to declare permanence in U.S. society. This permanence instilled in them the importance of academic persistence. Below Frida voiced what many participants described as Latinos’ determination to succeed:

I guess I felt that even though I was feeling bad, and there were some days I didn’t want to go to class and some assignments I didn’t want to do, I knew in my heart that I had to do it. I had to continue. I felt like this is just what happens, you know, "Mexicanos no se rajan" [Mexicans do not give up]. Like you have to keep on going.

Participants reasoned that their ability to persist was a consequence of their ethnic identity and how that group holistically approached life challenges. All but one of these participants had immigrant parents, and these participants described utilizing personal resources such as reflecting on their ethnic group and their struggles, to channel internal positive thinking to demonstrate educational resilience. These students drew on an ethnic immigrant identity, which was not their own, to establish that they were not giving in despite academic or social struggles.

These students were able to demonstrate educational resilience because they used their ethnic pride as a confirmation for their persistence. For example, many internalized that like their immigrant families, they were in a foreign place academically where their families had never engaged. Similar to their families who were not going to surrender, the
students’ had to academically succeed. These students reasoned that their families did not yield their desire to come to the U.S., find a job and/or achieve their definition of success, and as first-generation Latino/a college students, they too were going to persist.

Ethnic identity, in the aspect of culture (art, music, literature, food) was also an important internal stimulus for achieving educational resilience. Music enabled educational resilience by reminding participants of their ethnic background, and to persist toward their academic future. Jacquelyn’s account of a song by a popular Latino band distinctly describes the role that music embodied:

My favorite song for this experience is from Mana "Bendita tu Luz." It’s my inspiration. It just has amazing words, like "blessed, blessed you being here, your light, blessed." … Blessing the light inside you, whatever is motivating you, blessed to allow you to motivate you enough to be here trying to accomplish your goal. I just lock myself in my room and listen to this music. I definitely relate to songs and it just helps me. It helped with motivation because like I said earlier I know my family would love [to] help me out, financially mentally, everything.

Latino music and expressions were commonly mentioned as external resources that facilitated internal meaning within students about their college experience, and helped them demonstrate educational resilience. In other cases, food was connected to developing an internal resource of ethnic pride. Ester said, “My parents support me by cooking the food that I like.” Another student also referenced food: “I told my Dad that after he made me enchiladas, I got an A on the test.” Students described the food as connection to their familial and cultural roots, enabling them to utilize those internal resources to achieve a postsecondary education degree.

In a sense, these students internalized their ethnic identity as facilitating and enabling a type of cultural migration into postsecondary education. In doing so they were
able to draw on their ethnic identity and embrace it as college students as a way to relocate themselves and academically center themselves within a postsecondary education space. Once they did this, these students described establishing a sense of belonging within the institution, feeling invested as college students because they believed that they could continue.

Embracing their ethnic identity helped these students to link their college student identity to their ethnic identity, which facilitated their ability to focus academically and demonstrate educational resilience. Merging ethnic identity with their college student identity propelled these study participants towards educational resilience by establishing academic confidence and identity. Educational resilience for these participants was achievable because they did not have to abandon their ethnic identity to achieve a college degree. These students converted their ethnic identity into a resource by shifting meaning from what postsecondary education deemed a risk factor into a source of pride and positive motivation. In doing so, these students internalized their ethnic identity to direct them to utilize educational resilience.

Connection to literature. This present study reestablished that Latino/a first-generation college students used their strong sense of ethnic identity to overcome academic obstacles, echoing previous links between ethnic identity and educational resilience (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Gonzalez, 2007). Students’ description that their ethnic identity helped them overcome challenges and contributed to their educational resilience is confirmed by Clauss-Ehlers, Yang, and Chen’s (2006) research findings that learning about one’s ethnic identity and having a strongly formed sense of it at
enrollment enabled resilience for Latino/a, White, African American and Asian college students. These findings inform this present study’s findings that participants had a strong ethnic identity prior to entering the university.

The present study broadens research showing that for Latino first-generation college students,’ ethnic identity helps them demonstrate educational resilience because persistence to college challenges other's assumptions about their ethnicity. These students entered their postsecondary institution with positive ethnic identity; they confronted social and academic challenges like issues related to Latino’s immigration status and educational attainment, which collectively prompted their educational resilience. When these Latino/a individuals transition into a first-generation college student population, their ethnic identity within this community translates into an internal purpose to positively represent Latinos in postsecondary environments. They will draw on this tool to contribute to Latino communities and societies, and beyond. Ethnic identity thus translates into academic competence, which students draw on to demonstrate educational resilience.

**Connection to literature.** Results show similarities to educational resilience research in the secondary education sector, which found that Latino/a high school students’ educational resilience was influenced by ethnic identity (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). The current study’s findings extend understanding about educational resilience and ethnic identity for Latino/a first-generation college students (where no research has been identified) by advancing how, at this academic level, ethnic identity is a positive resource for these students. For example, postsecondary education literature identified
that cultural symbols and music “served as a source of cultural nourishment with the function of replenishing the cultural starvation that they experienced on campus” (Gonzalez, 2000/2001, p. 85). The present study enriches what we know about the phenomena in postsecondary education by inferring that ethnicity identity is an internal resource that influences educational resilience, which students rely on to persist.

**Sense of Purpose**

In this present study, 18 participants conveyed that sense of purpose served as an internal resource for achieving their degree, and helped them demonstrate educational resilience in part because of the benefit to their larger Latino/a community. This differs from ethnic identity by contributing to their community rather than representing their community. Sense of purpose as an internal resource motivated participants to demonstrate educational resilience and achieve academic aspirations and achieve academic goals that would benefit their larger ethnic community. Hector’s statement captures the essence of participants’ sense of purpose for attaining a college degree:

> One of the sayings that [my friend Raul] told me that sticks with me forever was, "If in your plan to improve yourself, you are not improving your community, then you have failed in your future."

These students found great sense of purpose in their achievement of a college degree because it meant educationally advancing future Latino/a generations, not only their own. Students’ educational resilience emerged while viewing themselves as examples of academic potential that their ethnic group was capable of achieving. Arellano and Padilla (1996) found that Latino/a students determination to achieve a college degree came from knowing they would advance the lives of other Latino/as.
Internalizing being a college success facilitated within these Latino first-generation college students a passion to continue because they wanted to be examples to their Latino peers and young adolescents that they could achieve a college degree. This study highlights that a vision of collectivism, meaning racial uplift, inspired these study’s participants internally in their journey to draw upon to demonstrate educational resilience.

In addition to being an example to their ethnic community, educational resilience emerged for these Latino/a first-generation students through the connections they made by giving back to their Latino communities (i.e., volunteering). Janet’s account of being a mentor at her old high school is an example of how achieving her degree was done for the purpose of not only representing her family, but also giving back to her community:

I want to go back to my high school one day and be an academic advisor….so I feel like having someone from a Latino descent… I came from the same school and neighborhood… is more motivational than someone who took the job just to take the job.

Volunteering at her old high school allowed her to see student’s needs, a population from which she came and her nieces resided. As a result, Janet was not only mentoring, but also the community mentored her by reminding her of the hardships she had to overcome to survive her high-crime Chicago community, and graduate from her low-performing high school. This gave Janet the view that the most difficult challenge she encountered was graduating high school, so she knew she could achieve academic success in college.

Involvement with their community helped incite students’ educational resilience by providing academic courage, both mental and emotional, to continue their academic journey. Multiple participants had accounts similar to Janet and talked about going back
to their communities as assistant track coaches, tutors, and mentors. By returning and giving back to their communities, they internalized that at the postsecondary education level, they are representative of their communities. They then transfer that into a reason that they should academically persist. Their educational resilience emerges because seeing where they came from and the circumstances under which they achieved validates the hard work and provides a reason for persisting toward a degree. These students internalized their communities as concrete, real life reminders their degrees will aid their communities, once they complete them. Thus, a direct connection to their communities encourages them to persist, and not give up because if they do, they are giving up on their ethnic identity and communities.

**Connection to literature.** Substantiating this present study’s findings, Gonzalez’s (2007) study established that Latina Ph.D. students’ persistence was also connected to their long-term goals of advancing the Latino/a community. Latina Ph.D.’s described persisting beyond their undergraduate degree because their purpose for attaining their degree was for a larger function. In examining similar populations to this study, scholars (e.g., Cavazos, Johnson, Fielding, Cavazos, Castro, & Vela, 2010; Morales, 2008) recognized when students developed a sense of purpose attached to their Latino communities and gave back to them, they were able to demonstrate educational resilience and not abandon their educational aspirations.

Hector and Janet’s cases are consistent with previous research that suggests individuals developed a sense of academic purpose from mentoring and connecting with young Latino/as. Barajas and Pierce (2001) reported that Latino/a and Latina college
students who mentored high school students attained their degree in part because of resolve formed by spending time with high school aged members of their ethnic group. The authors stressed that Latinas specifically used their relationships with mentees as external resources to remind them that their degree has meaning and impact beyond themselves. In essence, their mentees served as a safeguard and pathway for achieving educational resilience. Perez’s et al. (2009) study on undocumented Latino/a college students similarly found that students who volunteered were more likely to be educationally resilient.

As Barajas and Pierce (2001) stated, Latino/a college students “create new relationships as mentors and in mentor program because they share what they have learned about being successful Latinas, and they add to their positive self-understanding by acting as role models” (p. 869). Those conclusions support what was espoused by Janet, Jacquelyn, and Trillion, which was a sense of responsibility and intent to use their degree to enhance and educate their communities. These findings not only confirm research that Latino/as are an ethnic group that function as cooperative group (Gay, 2000; Kagan, 1977; Marin & Triandis, 1985; Cox, Lobel, McLeod, 1991), but community-oriented people who view themselves as agents (Grossmen, 1984) whose communities play a fundamental role in their persistence (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). The findings from the current study enhance previous research in explaining that Latino first-generation college students are educationally resilient because they internally transposed the mentoring roles, and used those connections to drive their persistence.
Thus, their ability to persist is more about how they internalize those relationships than about retaining ties to their communities through mentorship.

The current study’s findings provide some answers to Hernandez and Lopez’s (2004) call for further research on whether “external obligations of peers and community are an asset or a detriment to Latino students” (p. 53). The findings are important because they contextualize how external relationships, such as Latino peer mentor-mentee, internally alter and influence the mentor. This is important given that this population is finding their sense of purpose in a non-postsecondary education population, one that is immersed in academic, social and economic struggles. However by being reminded that their degree was meant to serve their Latino community, they situated their internal thoughts about their purpose in college by mentoring those external to their postsecondary experience. The struggle of those coming after these Latino first-generation college students enabled them to persevere and demonstrate educational resilience at the postsecondary education level.

**Question 2: How and what external resources do Latino/a First-generation college students internalize to demonstrate educational resilience?**

This present study answered question two in describing that Latino first-generation college students internalized external resources as motivation to persist. The present study identified that Latino first-generation college students consistently described drawing on external resources to utilize educational resilience.
**Parental Hard Work Ethic**

A primary external resource that participants drew on was their parents’ sense of purpose about their job and the work ethic they implemented to substantively influence their capacity to be educationally resilient. Research participants also described their parents as having significantly affected, as a unit or individually, their persistence to achieve a college degree. All 19 participants expressed that their parents were external resources, whose working-class positions shaped their internal college student ideology. Three viewpoints were drawn from interview data revealing the ways in which students internalized their parents’ work ethic and approach to reach their degree: 1) role modeling academic behaviors after parents’ hard work ethic, 2) parents’ educational background not being predictive of their academic potential, and 3) parents’ working-class status inspiring students’ academic and upward mobility. In the section below, three distinct quotes are studied to explain how students internalized their parents’ attitudes and behaviors into their own attitudes and academic behaviors to self-cultivate educational resilience.

The first central perspective that permeated students’ internal dialogue to foster educational resilience is imitation of parents’ hard work ethic. Hector’s comment captures the essence of what many participants relayed about internalizing their parents’ hard work principles within their college student roles:

> When I was growing up my father, on extended periods had to work two jobs, so it was some of that, that hard brute force. So some of that made the transition into college easy. Working some of the summers with them in construction was extremely difficult and I knew that was not something I wanted for myself or my future.
Nineteen students reported that witnessing their parents tirelessly work two jobs, completing double shifts or working seven days a week served as an external resource that they internalized to demonstrate their educational resilience. They did so by replicating the parents’ work examples they observed.

Emilio, Hector, and Mayra espoused the idea that being a college student was their “job,” and their academic success would come from “not sleeping,” “studying a double shift,” and “pushing through.” This view nurtured self-confidence within them, but more specifically the conviction to perform the necessary work to achieve their degree. The students adopted their parents’ work ethic as their own and while unconventional for some, enacted behaviors that enabled their educational resilience. Educational resilience developed within students’ because they regarded their parents’ work ethic as a resilient innate proficiency, and implementing their parents’ work principles facilitated their academic success. While many of these students’ parent’s work systems were not directly part of their environment, they utilized the behavior their parents executed to be successful academically. Whether it was their parents’ going to work with cancer, as Janet’s father did because he was the family’s sole provider, or on little sleep, these students persisted despite discomfort and challenge because it was a norm they saw from their parents.

In another sense, these students utilized their parents’ jobs, which were far-removed from their college student roles and environments, as motivating factors in their persistence. Students revealed how their desire for academic upward mobility was based on their parents’ work profession, which they used as an external source to draw on and
demonstrate educational resilience. Alejandro’s description of a conversation he had with his mother exemplifies how parents’ jobs transpired into internalized resources for this population:

Until this day, I tell my mother, the work you do with housekeeping, it’s honorable and I appreciate all that you do for me but I do not want to be in your place and I do not want to do the work that you are doing. And her response is that "I don't want you to do this type of work, I want you to move ahead and get somewhere in life and be something more than what I am.”

All of the students in this study noted that part of their ability to persist came from them espousing that they would not follow their parents’ career. This emerged as gratefulness to their parents’ for holding the jobs they did as maintenance, construction, office assistants and housewives. In developing this reasoning these students developed an academically unfaltered passion to achieve their college degree. For example, these students described that their ability to demonstrate educational resilience came from wanting to prove that children of working class parents are capable and belong at postsecondary educational institutions. Further, regardless of their parents’ background they would attain a postsecondary education degree. For these students this was a powerful resource for their educational resilience because it validated that their parents’ ability was more than physical labor and could be used to help them achieve academically. These students viewed themselves as extensions of their parents, thus they wanted to prove that their parents were also intelligent, and their persistence was proof of it.

An example of how these Latino first-generation college students do not discount their parent’s working class experience, but instead use it to cultivate educational
resilience (particularly in relation to academic potential) can be found in Mayra’s example below:

I learned [to not give up] from parents and I just I think it just goes back to like learning that even though they didn’t get their college degree or a higher education of any kind, that there are a lot of characteristics that you can learn from them and I think for me it was just hard work, determination, never giving-up… I feel like I am not necessarily the most intelligent person, but I feel that because I have seen how hard my parents have worked and what they have been able to give my siblings and I do understand the value of hard work.

Mayra’s statement gives insight about why students’ value their parents’ working-class job for positively influencing their educational potential or attainment. Given these students’ beliefs, educational resilience transpired because they developed a type of psychological protective factor.

For example, to elaborate on Mayra’s comments, students internally reasoned that they were determined not to fail academically because of their parents’ working-class background and model of perseverance in the face of obstacles. Particularly considering such working-class actions as long hours of labor, and physical and mental effort, these students established that they were capable of achieving educational resilience if they used similar effort in their studies. Students internalized that academic work was easier than their parent’s working class jobs, thus they persisted to academic success.

Students placed heavier value on their parent’s commitment to work, work background, and position to help them persist than on their parent’s educational attainment. The first-generation Latino college students internalized their parents’ work ethic as most significant to their persistence. These students utilized their parents’ work ethic as providing them with the foundation to “navigate” the college experience and
emerge as educationally resilient.

**Connection to literature.** Literature within secondary education on educational resilience affirms these participants’ claims that the indirect messages parents sent on having and executing a hard work ethic affected them as students (e.g., Ceja, 2004). This study also further adds that for some Latino/a first-generation college students, some of the academic behaviors they performed were derived from a working-class model. Thus, this study provides tangible examples of how these students’ study efforts were unique to their identity.

These conclusions enhance Morales and Trotman’s (2004) statement, specifically among Latino/a first-generation college students, that when a strong work ethic is modeled, students strive to model and emulate it within their educational communities. These conclusions corroborate and enhance the minimal research identifying that Latino/a college students believed that hard work yields academic success (Cavazos, et al., 2010), but also that it was more important than intelligence to their academic achievement (Cavazos et al. 2010; Gandara, 1995).

None of the students shared a belief that their parents’ low educational attainment and working-class positions would yield negative academic outcomes for themselves. In fact students reasoned that because of their parents’ pride in performing at high levels in their job, they were able to perform as college students.

The present study establishes and adds to the research on how continual coping plays a role in educational resilience. Students shared that despite struggling they embraced challenges and continued achieving because they knew their parents were also
working to survive in their jobs. These findings provide more qualitative complexity to Morales’ (2008) research examining 20 Latino/a first-generation college students, which ascertained that resilient students sometimes have an advantage over more affluent peers because they and their parents have had to work hard to achieve. Parent’s work ethic, an external resource that was internalized by these study’s participants, impacted students’ ability to be educationally resilient by helping them establish that working hard is the key to achieving a degree. In students normalizing their parents’ minimal educational attainment, they patterned their academic approach after their parents’ hard work ethic.

Students’ normalized and/or minimized the effect of their parent’s low educational attainment by determining that work ethic was a resilient characteristic they could draw on to motivate them to persist. Postsecondary education literature on Latino/a students established that educational resilience is directly founded from drawing on their parents’ job as a core resource (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Morales, 2008; Morales & Trotman, 2004). Additional research on Latino/a college students has also identified that parents’ working-class job compels these students to strive toward an education to attain a non-working class job, and it also stimulates them to function at a high standard within any job they attain (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Ceja 2004; Gandara, 1995; Morales, 2008).

The present study identified that educational resilience among Latino/a college students is demonstrated when they internalize their desire to enhance not only their job, but also their overall quality of life. Students expressed aspirations for having a standard of living with abundant family time, improved standard of living, in addition to professional opportunity and upward mobility. Students saw by the monetary, physical
and quality of life strain that their parents’ jobs had on their life as a motivator to persist in their degree.

Findings in this study show that students do not consider their parents’ academic or work background deficits, but rather an effective structure from which to approach their postsecondary education experience. This present study advances secondary education and postsecondary education research findings that Latino/a first-generation students’ approach toward postsecondary education academic is grounded in their parent’s work ethic and their working class job.

**Peer Influence**

Latino/a first-generation college students’ educational resilience developed, in part, from connecting to peers with similar background and upbringing. Seventeen students said that having likeminded, academically successful peers helped them overcome challenges. Whether it was meeting students within the campus community or through a student organization, peers served as external resources that internally shaped Latino/a first-generation college students’ belief in their own academic ability, and ideology.

Trillion’s description of the relationship she had with two of her peers is a powerful example:

I just felt like finally I have friends, and that was exciting… [W]e were all sociology majors, so we all took the same courses. A very tight little clique, we did our homework together and we had the same ideas, ‘cause they were both RAs and that worked out excellent in my favor. I would sleep over in their dorms, and they would feed me all the time, because they had high meal plans. And the way I reciprocated that is I would buy the textbooks, ‘cause we were all poor. So like we would all help each other in different ways ‘cause I didn't have money to feed myself. And I
did have money for textbooks, and that's how we worked as a unit to survive at Loyola.

Having a “unit” as Trillion described, is an important element for achieving educational resilience. Participants explained that peers provided them with a physical example that they could persist.

Eighteen of the participants conveyed that their peers were their role models given that they were undertaking a similar academic goal. For these Latino first-generation students their peers allowed them to internalize that achieving an undergraduate degree was within their proximity. Many of their peers encountered struggles, such as having low-academic self-esteem, not establishing a sense of belonging, and not being able to relate to their parents who did not attend college; yet they continued to persist. As a result, these participants internalized that moving along in their degree was imminent, and that achieving their undergraduate degree was academically possible. Their peers normalized these first-generation students’ experiences within a postsecondary educational environment, which made educational resilience achievable. These students were able to embrace that the experience was not only short-term, but also would not result in academic failure.

Mayra described how juniors and seniors with similar backgrounds allowed her to undertake an internal academic credence:

[Her confidence in me] made me feel like she thought that I did have potential to do something. Because sometimes I feel like if someone has nothing to tell you, it’s like there’s no hope for you. I saw how well she was doing in school, and she would tell me, ‘I finished my paper early,’ and I was like, ‘How do you finish early?’ I just feel like it kind of made me feel like, she was just helping me do something that probably anyone can do and it’s just things that you just need someone to remind you that
like, you need to start this project early or ask your professors for help. I felt like she had hope that I could do well in school.

Feeling like they would and could be successful was a common theme among this group, for that sentiment developed into the educational resilience that they should and could continue. Having peers who advised, encouraged, or role modeled college behaviors or skills allowed these students to establish internal resources such as self-worth about their academic ability. Participants communicated that peers helped them overcome academic probation, taught them study strategies, and how to navigate the university culture. Peers enabled these students to develop a sense of emotional and academic stability, which internalized within them the importance of continuing their academic path.

Connecting to peers in student organizations also yielded relationships and friendships that allowed study participants’ to demonstrate educational resilience because peers educated them on how to undertake the college environment. Miguel said:

One of the [fraternity] brothers [and] I had a deep relationship. He was my go-to advisor. Whenever I was stressed out I would go to him and he would calm me down. I had another one who is pre-med who is graduating this weekend and he was kind of more like telling me how to study. And of course he always pushed all-nighters, and I was like, "Dude, all-nighters." He would always quiz me and I would quiz him. We would just help each other a lot to study.

Educational resilience emerged within students because peers positively shaped their locus of control. Student organizations, particularly Latino/a, provided help from peers, which facilitated students’ development of a positive sense of academic self. Student peers offered an important form of internalizing an academic pulse within
students, which motivated them to continue the steps to move forward in their academic career.

Peers inspired study participants to experience their future as a college student, which motivated them to persist. Although some of their peers graduated, participants often drew on them for inspiration. They described that they wanted to show how grateful they were to their peers for their support and positive role modeling, and graduate as a way to say thank you to them. They also talked about paying it forward and wanting to show first- and second-year students that although they faced difficulty, they could achieve their degree. These students demonstrated educational resilience by establishing relationships with peers and utilizing them as physical reminders of their academic fate and potential.

**Connection to literature.** Students’ descriptions about their peers corroborate previous findings that peers influence adjustment to the college climate, especially among students of color (Hurtado, Carter, & Spulur, 1996; Richard & Skinner, 1992; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003). However, these findings specifically enrich educational resilience literature by indicating that peers gave Latino/a first-generation college students’ the ability to overcome feelings of isolation and academic incompetence to foster educational resilience. Such findings are sporadically found in research on Latino/a first-generation college students and educational resilience.

These findings are also important because they corroborate educational resilience findings among other Latino college populations. For example Gonzalez’s (2007) study of Latina doctoral graduates found that they attained positive experiences in forming
relationships and positive attachment with other doctoral students of color, particularly other Latinas, which helped them enhance their value of school. Consistent with this study, Gonzalez further, found that Latino/as had difficulty building relationships with their White peers and faculty, which led to feeling isolated, and no sense of belonging. In this study, participants explained that peers facilitated developing a consciousness that they were not alone as Latino/a first-generation college students.

These findings also validate longstanding undergraduate research on the importance of peers to persistence. For example, Attinasi (1989) studied 18 Latino/a college students and theorized that students utilize peers to develop “cognitive maps” of large and complex spaces, such as a college university, to learn expectations, stereotypes values, and beliefs. The students then simplify and modify this information in accordance with their own requirements and experience. Hernandez’s (2000) research affirms what students in this study stated—that peers helped them learn and make sense of how they should approach, and navigate being a college student. Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco’s (2005) study of Latino/a and Asian first-generation college students had similar findings as the current research in that students perceive peers as better adept than family to give the support needed in order to do well in college.

Findings from this study were also corroborated by Kenny’s et al. (2002) findings on resilient high school seniors, which included some first-generation Latino/a students. These students partly attributed their academic success to their peer networks that enabled them to overcome the idea that their attempt at a college degree was not an anomaly. Research about resilient youth advocates that relationships with non-family
members enable youth under significant stress to develop competency within life areas like school, home and social skills, academic and vocational goals and expectations (Hauser & Bolds, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1992). Students were educationally resilient because their peers’ presence and support normalized the college experience for them and resulted in their view that they would do well academically and be able to meet the academic demands. Resilience research on high school students of color found that educational support from peers is strongly associated with educational resilience (Alva, 1991; Kenny et al., 2002).

This study broadens research at the postsecondary education level by providing an explanation for how resilience is present within the undergraduate population. Such findings are important to counter previous research that suggested some Latino/a students self-select out of co-curricular involvement and are educationally resilient (Hernandez 2002). Students in this study reported that student organizations helped them reveal their educational resilience by helping them build peer relationships. Also, this study is valuable given that the influence of co-curricular activities on educational resilience within the Latino/a population in postsecondary educational environments is minimally corroborated. One example is Perez’s et al. (2009) research on resilient Latino/a first-generation undocumented college students. They found students persisted because participation in co-curricular activities made them less vulnerable and provided them with motivation and a support unit.

Eighteen students explained that peers they met in student organizations helped them navigate institutional policies and procedures, and served as mentors, teachers, and
advisors. Peers offered academic advising, counseling, time management skills, and helped clarify campus culture and norms. These discoveries also align with other researcher’s findings on impact of peers (Hernandez, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Reyes, 1997). The present study suggests that Latino/a student membership groups such as Latino/a student organizations facilitate students’ sense of belonging on campus, as well an affinity for developing relationships with faculty or other students. This established research confirms Miguel’s description of peers becoming academic advocates.

Participating in these groups established participants’ educational resilience because the groups allowed them to find peers who completely understood their experience. They could be vulnerable around their peers and became academically empowered by them. Astin (1984) posited that student involvement, such as student organizations, allows students to become better oriented to the college environment, and to feel more a part of and take interest in college life. Researchers stressed that a rich benefit to student involvement is persistence among college students (Astin, 1975; Hernandez, 2000), which corroborates students’ declarations in this study.

Study participants expressed that peers played an important role in moving them along in their degree, whether it was because they were Latino/a or they connected with them in a student organization. As supported by Tinto (1993), an important consequence of the interaction described by research participants is that role modeling from juniors and seniors is a proven effective retention tool, and in particular, especially among disadvantaged minority students. Astin (1993) also concluded that some of the most
important predictors of college outcomes were attributes of students’ peer groups. Hernandez (2000) reported that among Latinos, peers from similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds helped one another self-identify as relevant within the larger postsecondary community. This literature supports the important role that peer networks have in helping students believe they can and will persist.

This study enhances educational resilience research on Latino/a college students because it demonstrates that this group’s educational degree is in part achieved by internalizing their peers persistence and educational achievement into determination. It clearly establishes that these students’ educational resilience came from internalizing their peers’ college experience as a stimulus to persist academically. Students were motivated by their peers’ backgrounds, their ability to learn the postsecondary educational system, and how they overcame academic, social and economic struggle to persist in their degree. What is useful to research about this present study’s finding is that these Latino first-generation college students do not only embrace the positive aspects of their peers’ college experience to demonstrate educational resilience but also their struggles. This research provides understanding that drive and persistence to achieve a college degree for this group comes from internalizing the idea that academic struggle can be overcome.

**Faculty Validation**

Latino first-generation college students also internalize faculty validation to demonstrate educational resilience and achieve their postsecondary degree. How faculty interactions and messages (external resources) validated Latino/a first-generation
students’ educational resilience is described below. Mayra’s description represents what nine participants felt after receiving positive faculty remarks:

She always had something good to say about my paper. I remember one time she said, “Thank you for writing such an original paper. Your ideas are always some of the most original I have read.” I mean I was in my room and I just teared-up because no one had said that to me. I was just, I mean I guess, when I read that I felt that it’s okay that I am different.

Mayra’s response to the faculty member’s comments illustrates the internal form of empowerment that this type of exchange has on students. As a result of the positive interactions and communication, students developed confidence in their academic ability, which helped them develop educational resilience.

Faculty also initiated students’ educational resilience through orienting their internal thoughts about what they were capable of accomplishing. Several students discussed how faculty, similar to Alejandro’s explanation below, shaped their future professional orientations:

My honor society advisor, who was also one of my CJ professors, he told me, "Hey Alejandro, I think you should really consider going to Law School because of how you did in my class. I think you have the knack and ability to succeed in Law School and there is a need for more people like you in our community and profession.” So for somebody to tell me you have something, you have something, that many people don't have, that's pleasing, that makes me feel good.

For these participants, having faculty comment on their academic ability allowed them to form an innermost resistance against their academic failure. As a result, they were encouraged to be educationally resilient in order to achieve future educational goals. Faculty members enabled students to develop a concrete reason (their academic ability) to persist, which prior to the positive faculty experience, students described as vulnerable.
The support provided by faculty helped these students’ internal sense of belonging and academic self-worth by internalizing the positive interactions and feedback. They did so by internally recalling on faculty relationship in different situations or class settings. Mayra, for example, stated that the encouragement from her faculty member enabled her to speak more in other classroom environments. In Alejandro’s case, his professor’s feedback allowed him to internalize that he could be a successful lawyer, hence his plan to apply to law school. This significance of this resource in explaining students’ demonstration of educational resilience is the compelling fact that they internalized and drew on it in different environments, across years and classes. Faculty members helped these students demonstrate educational resilience by validating their academic ability beyond the classroom.

**Connection to literature.** The stories told by these students, identified findings that are corroborated by other researchers that student-faculty relationships are substantial for students’ social integration (Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995), that faculty have an effect on grade point average and college adjustment (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996), and that faculty affect retention and persistence (Hernandez, 2000). Hernandez (2000) substantiated this study’s finding that students’ connections with professors assist students in feeling they are cared for and respected. In essence, these students’ comments validate the power of culturally sensitive faculty and the influence they have on shaping the campus climate for students of color students. These individuals are key in creating a community where academic achievement becomes conceivable (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Pope et al., 2004; Rendon, 1994; 2000). Positive faculty interactions served as an external
resource that positioned participants as having the ability, verbal, and written intelligence to contribute to academic assignments and classroom environments.

As examined above, postsecondary education research abundantly finds that faculty is a powerful resource for Latino/a college students. However, what was missing is data on faculty impact on Latino/a first-generation college students when considering educational resilience. What this present study does is advance that even when examining Latino first-generation students’ educational resilience and how they overcome a risk factor such as first-generation identity, faculty are most influential.

Educational resilience research on Latino/a first-generation college students has slightly identified faculty’s significance on this population. Morales (2008) found that professors who invested in Latino/a college students contributed to them reaching academic goals. Research also revealed that resilient students do not have to encounter positive relationships with faculty to persist. For example, Gonzalez (2007) found that Latina Ph.D. students “found ways to [find] positive aspects of negative experiences and to forgive those who oppressed them [faculty]” (p. 295).

Research on educational resilience in postsecondary education and faculty members’ is researched in regards to their influence on Latino/a students but the research is sparse. For example, Mayra and Alejandro emphasized that faculty positively influenced their academic self-esteem, and this echoes Kenny et al. (2002), who found that students often look to faculty for encouragement and advice. Scholars (Alva, 1991; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Kenny et al., 2002) found that Latino/a college students’ educational resilience improved after affirmative interactions with faculty. As students in
this study indicated, the positive sentiments from faculty interactions allowed students to produce strong work and develop motivation to attend or persist in college. Rendon (1993) emphasized that faculty served as validation and are an impetus for students’ of color persistence. This conclusion is supported by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) mattering/marginality literature, which posited that college students needed to believe that they “matter” in order to achieve academic success. Resilience research stresses that relationships with a caring adult or mentor can buffer children from many adverse life circumstances (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982).

The present study distinctively contributes to the literature by extending the findings that faculty validation is used as a form of internal stimulus that persuades Latino, first-generation college students to demonstrate educational resilience. The impact that faculty have on this Latino first-generation college students goes beyond a moment in time or a classroom experience, and is adopted by these students as academic certainties that they can function as college students. Faculty have a strong ability to center student’s academic philosophy by altering students’ sense of academic self. This research informs the finding that students’ achievement of educational resilience is made possible by faculty’s ability to impact student’s inner thoughts. Faculty impact students’ educational resilience by positively or negatively shaping the academic rumination that occurs in students’ minds, which shapes their persistence.
Financial Aid

Financial aid practice surfaced as another external resource that was converted by these students into an internal resource, which contributed to their educational resilience. Eighteen of the 19 students described loans as essential to achieving their undergraduate degree, and a process they embraced as long-term benefit. Specifically, nine students detailed how they internalized that obtaining loans was an essential piece of their persistence. Although loan debt for these students caused unease, they internalized it as a pathway to their academic success. When these students internalized financial aid, they mentally positioned it as a form of empowerment to move along their educational resilience. Janet’s description of taking out loans is a valuable example:

I think it's the fact that I was always afraid of taking out loans. I hear so many bad stories. I took out the loan and then I was like, there's no going back. I was thinking, “What if I fail, I am going to have to repay all the loans with no degree.”

Janet’s words demonstrate that students’ loans served as a motivator that they must persist because it was not acceptable to have to repay a loan without having achieved a postsecondary education degree. In essence, participants expressed that loans, which many described as a “privilege,” was an internal resource because they emotionally accepted that they would be repaying loans for years. Students confidently conveyed that loan debt was worthwhile when having achieved a college degree. Some of the students described this approach as progress while others described it as welcoming sacrifices.

However, in general, all of these students, who identified as low-income, described the financial obligations incurred not as a deficit or an adversity, but as giving
them “drive” to persist. These students’ monetary sacrifice, by accepting loan debt, became their internal pledge to move forward towards their degree and not stop out or withdraw. Students commonly stated feeling privileged to undertake all that is required to achieve a degree, “course work,” “long days,” and “student debt.” Alejandro, Emilio, and Hector shared that minimizing work or internship hours and making additional loan requests were sacrifices they welcomed to ensure degree completion.

Part of establishing a comfort with obtaining loans also meant ascertaining ease with being self-advocates and confidence in applying those skills. Trillion, described approaching her financial aid obligations with passion and initiative:

I was angry and I went in there with an attitude. Finally I found this man, Edward Roberts, and I have his business card, and it's up in my room. So whenever I have a financial problem, when I go to the HUB and when I go to whoever they send me to, I am like I want to talk to Edward. I don't want to talk to you cause I know what you are going to say to me. I already know what you are going to say. You are going to give me way more problems than what I already came in here with and you're not going to give me any solutions and you are going to make me feel bad, so bring Edward I want to talk to Edward.

Trillion exemplifies how students described loans and financial aid as establishing within them an internal crusade and a form of survival. As a result, these students were internally driven to apply themselves and exert the necessary behaviors to demonstrate educational resilience.

Student loan debt specifically became a form of emotional wealth that aided in their persistence, because they internally related it to an asset that embodied their prosperous future and academic potential. The loan was not equated to money but rather their own academic wherewithal as a long-term value. Given the large tuition cost of the
institution they attended, students described knowing before entering that finances would be a challenge, and mentally and monetarily doing what they could to prepare for the struggle. Students continuously stressed how essential loans were for their educational persistence because they helped them stay focused on educational goals rather than monetary struggles. For these educationally resilience students, financial aid (i.e., a loan) was a not just a loan, but an internal resource that they drew on as a reminder of their goals, inner sense of responsibility, and future investment.

**Connection to literature.** The findings from this study contradict previous research about Latino/a college students and financial debt. Scholars previously postulated that when families assess and consider the financial responsibilities they will incur due to college enrollment, it impedes Latino/a students entering and persisting in postsecondary institutions (Sutton & Nora, 2008). Part of that reason is an environmental pull factor, which is fear of debt, and the financial issues related to attending college (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Nora & Crisp, 2008; Sutton & Nora, 2008). The findings from this study reveal a different understanding of underprivileged students’ perceptions about college costs. Debt is not seen as a barrier to enrollment in college, but rather a push to aspire to attend and complete college when they are assured of a way to pay for college costs through financial aid (Abraham & Clark 2006; Avery & Kane 2004; Kao & Tienda 1998; King 1996).

Although findings confirmed Honan and deAcosta’s (1996)’s study who found that Latino/a students faced severe financial hardships, it differed from previous research in that it did not find that finances inhibited students from staying and completing
college. Further, the present study confirmed an existing study that found that first-generation students identified cost of attendance and receiving financial aid as important factors in their college selection process (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Lindholm, Korn, & Mahoney, 2005). They were more likely to come from lower-income families and more likely to be concerned about their ability to pay for their college education (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Pryor, et. al., 2005). Largely, the present study proves Santiago et al.’s (2010) explanation that Latino/a undergraduates are more likely to apply for financial aid than all undergraduates in order to pay for college. All of the students in this study acknowledged and embraced that loans would be their pathway to persisting. This finding echoes Berkner and Chavez (1997) who argued that lack of financial aid is not as important a barrier to college access as are low student expectations, lack of academic preparation, and failure to take an entrance exam and to apply to college. The current study’s finding is contrary to past research conducted by Hu and St. John (2001) in which all types of financial aid were proven to advance persistence among these students, with the exception of student loans.

These findings add a unique perspective to educational resilience research among Latino/a first-generation college students by identifying how students internalize financial aid to demonstrate educational resilience at the postsecondary education level. This study expands research and highlights that Latino/a first-generation college students who are educationally resilient are so because they internalize loan debt as a way to develop self-confidence and a way to help them focus academically.
Connection of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Paradigm to the Findings

In this chapter the themes identified from the 19 participant interviews were analyzed and positioned within Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ecological framework, which situates a person’s development in the bi-directional interaction between individuals and their environments. What this means for Latino first-generation college students is that they continue in relationship with individuals and contexts from these various environments. Explicitly they draw on internal and external resources, human and/or contextual, from those systems to demonstrate educational resilience. Eliciting support from these internal and external resources and advancing academically are connected to achieving or facilitating educational resilience because they serve as either a foundation, motivation, and/or model from which they draw on to persist. The present research identified that students most interacted with the following systems to elicit support and to advance academically: the role of parents and peers represent the microsystem; faculty represent the mesosystem; the macrosystems are seen in the students’ ethnic pride and sense of purpose; financial aid represents the exosystem; and chronosystems are seen as first-generation status and self-identifying as at-risk. Understanding and contextualizing the external and internal resources that Latino/a first-generation college students internalize to academically persist is important to understanding their educational resilience.

Results from this study’s analysis provide understanding of the ways in which students’ draw from various environments to demonstrate educational resilience. Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) ecological model provides context to these findings, which
situates an individual in an interactive role with multiple settings that ultimately influence developmental outcomes (Umana-Taylor, 2004). These students’ accounts provide rich descriptions of how such contextual resources influenced students’ educational resilience.

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model of Human Development Informed by the Present Study’s Findings
Participants’ descriptions and stories demonstrate how specific environmental systems interact with their role as Latino/a first-generation college students to influence and shape their educational resilience. The findings indicate that both the proximal and distal environments have an effect on Latino/a first-generation college students. This present study gives consideration to the need for more internal perspectives to be examined when studying the educational resilience of Latino/a first-generation college students. College students' do not only draw on external resources to persist to the point of graduation. Instead, systems from which students draw support are complex, varied and occur over their lifespan.

For example within the microsystem, which is often considered family, as students transition into different environments this system expands to include others. This present study provides strong understanding about how for these students their parents’ support shifts to internalization. Parents’ influence in their child’s educational experience does not disappear because they did not attain a postsecondary education degree. In addition, as these Latino/a first-generation college students expand their immediate surrounding and relationships, peers become important sources of internal support. In line with Tinto (1987), students in this study describe that beyond their personal attributes, their parents’ and peers’ habits, temperament and capabilities influenced them. This confirms how Latino/a first-generation students’ inner-most environmental layer shaped how they have demonstrated educational resilience and persisted. The mircroosystem is the environment in which an individual lives, and involves the most social and direct interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 2005b). The individual is not an observer in the
microsystem, but a facilitator in creating and constructing lived experiences. Findings indicate that these two external groups, when internalized, are a great influence on students’ educational resilience. Bearing in mind that these two groups neither have a degree nor experience in postsecondary education, understanding how and why parents and peers are so influential becomes more valuable to educators working with Latino/a first-generation college students.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) models situates that development is elevated when there is strong healthy connections between microsystems which make-up the mesosystems. In this study, faculty helped these participants demonstrate educational resilience by developing within them academic self-efficacy. Faculty’s constructive teaching approach allowed these students to materialize a self-assured sense of their academic self. The findings show the importance that environmental resources that fall within the mesosystem, namely faculty, internally assist these students’ demonstration of educational resilience. These findings reveal a need to further understand contextual factors’ influence on these students educational resilience, mainly those socially constructed within postsecondary education.

Bronfenbrenner (1993) also described that the macrosystem respects that development occurs when considering culture, subculture or social class contexts. This system espouses that social or cultural ideologies and beliefs shape an individual’s environment. Within this study, Latino/a first-generation students identified ethnic pride, and sense of purpose as salient to their being educationally resilient. Latino first-generation college students positioned that negative views and expectations individuals
held about their ethnic group enabled their internal pride from which they drew on to form positive academic attitudes, ideologies and behavior patterns, which allowed them to be educationally resilient. While sense of purpose, which was based in their ethnic pride, was about having a vision for the cultural values and expectations, they wanted to advance and foster. The vision for their sense of purpose was rooted in educationally advancing and engaging Latinos with similar backgrounds. These findings espouse that despite ethnic identity and sense of purpose, being centered within these students’ background and upbringing, they are internalized and utilized to demonstrate educational resilience. Although these systems are wide-ranging and overarching principles, Shaffer and Kipp (2007) described that what is identified within the systems is significant and should frame how students are taught, treated, and how they develop aspirations.

In fact the findings, within the abovementioned systems suggest two important considerations. The first is that relationships between individuals and environments are bi-directional. The next is that individuals (Latino/a first-generation students in this case) access various resources within their ecological environments to demonstrate educational resilience. In doing so this present study indicates that Latino/a first-generation college students approach their college experience as form of problem solving, and are constantly in a state of internal and external self-exploration to draw on and demonstrate educational resilience within a postsecondary educational environment.

The significance participants placed on financial aid (specifically student loans), which is within the exosystem, is a noteworthy finding that substantiates that this population is active and proactive about the environments they engage in bi-directionally
to demonstrate educational resilience. Students related financial sacrifice to their future self-worth and positive economic value. This positive view about attaining loans positioned the process as advantageous for their achievement, but more specifically it internalized a healthy reasoning and connection to financial aid.

Bronfenbrenner (1994) described the exosystem as connections between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role and it is not within their immediate context. In the postsecondary education context, this can be university policies and guidelines that are performed to direct or guide students’ academic behavior or experience. Specifically, a students’ experience in school may be affected by their exosystem, such as a university strategic plan or low enrollment rates that have an impact on school’s revenue. Puroila and Karila (2001) underlined that such exosystems that also describe the aspects that support education, have been studied insufficiently. Although the exosystem does not contain the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1993), students described that student loans enabled their educational resilience because they internalized it as a reason to meet their long-term academic goal. Overall, the findings imply that, regardless of their environment distance or control of them, Latino first-generation college students identified ways to draw on their environments, or be enabled by them to achieve educational resilience.

The indifference to distance is especially understood when considering students’ interaction with environments that fall within the chornosystem, and its influence on their educational resilience. Bronfenbrenner (1994) described that the chronosystem “encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristic of the person
but also of the environment in which that person lives.” Using the chronosystem not only as chronological passing of time, but containing property, provided meaning to this study because Latino students identified that their first-generation status empowered them to persist in two ways. The first is that the for these Latino students, their first-generation identity enabled them to achieve the goal of attaining a postsecondary educational degree. Also, the first-generation college student identity encouraged them to academically self-mobilize through self-identifying academic challenges, and holding themselves accountable for developing and overcoming them. In particular, students applied societal parameters and contexts inherent to first-generation identity as a framework to enable their educational resilience to persist. The findings presented are important because they contextualize how a life identity, such as a first-generation college student, does not disappear. Instead, as shown here, the identity shifts to an internal resource, establishing and creating new forms of patterns and support unlike those that can be provided by individuals or environments unfamiliar with the life experience.
CHAPTER SIX
RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS,
AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

The present study examined how Latino first-generation college students achieved and/or facilitated educational resilience to persist to the point of graduation. This chapter contextualizes the present study’s findings within recommendations for practice, future research recommendations, limitations, and strengths. Based on the present study’s findings, concrete recommendations for practice were developed for specific content areas within postsecondary education institutions. The recommendations for practice are within the following areas: institutional organization, career center, orientation, and tutoring center. Also, this chapter suggests how to expand research grounded in the thematic findings, and in particular, expanding educational resilience research within postsecondary education literature. The chapter includes a discussion of the study’s limitations and strengths. Finally, the researcher’s positionality is provided to frame the experience and effort undertaken to execute this study. This chapter serves to provide concluding perspectives on the research findings, and go beyond by situating them within the lived experiences of research participants. It also positions the findings within the relationships, communities and environments that Latino first-generation students inhabit.
**Recommendations for Practice**

This section offers institutional recommendations for practice among the Latino first-generation college student population. Recommendations for practice within several institutional areas are presented and they were drawn from the present study’s findings. This study provided understanding and descriptions on how Latino first-generation college students facilitated and achieved the educational resilience phenomenon while retaining the Latino/a and first-generation characteristic. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model as the theoretical framework, findings from this study identified that Latino first-generation college students drew from various environments and contexts to progress, and achieve or facilitate, educational resilience. Thus, the recommendations for practice were developed to consider the various relationships and environments in which these students engage. Recommendations for practice are therefore varied and interconnected to build community and relationships among faculty, staff and students.

**Institutional Practices**

*Multicultural/diversity offices.* In view of the present study’s findings, provided by all 19 participants, a recommendation for practice is that multicultural/diversity offices within post-secondary education institutions develop websites highlighting and documenting the Latino first-generation college student successes and experiences on that campus. This suggestion is offered with the premise that the webpage be housed within a diversity office, but should be a tool that can be utilized institution-wide by students, first-generation parents/family, peers, faculty and staff. The reasoning for developing and housing the webpage within diversity offices is organizational, given that these offices
are primarily charged with supporting populations of color and thus fiscal justification can be provided for allocating funds to develop a web resource specifically for the sub-population.

Given that institutional administrators create the foundation, view, and approach from which Latino first-generation college students will be supported and engaged, recommendations for practice were formed to provide institutions the opportunity to establish and frame their approach. Such an approach coming from a diversity office is especially useful given that these offices may be most at the pulse of knowing and understanding this population’s needs. This is important because institutional-wide practices provide frameworks for other university-wide initiatives. These institutional practices also set the tone for Latino first-generation college students about their place and belonging in the community.

Based on the present study’s findings, the webpage about and for Latino first-generation students means framing and centering them within all institutional environments. For example, the webpage should contain videos of Latino first-generation parents contextualizing and describing their experiences as parents to college students. The webpage should also include video narratives from Latino first-generation college students revealing their college student experience. For faculty and staff, the webpage should include specific information about Latino first-generation college students to provide them with data and research describing the population, current trends and how to work with the population. This institutional webpage should be one in which Latino first-generation students are highlighted, but also a place for external partners such as parents,
faculty, and staff to gather qualitative and quantitative understanding about this group.

The webpage should serve as a space for Latino first-generation college students to see themselves represented and succeeding at the postsecondary education institution they are attending. The webpage should include photos, contacts, and faculty and staff narratives about working with Latino first-generation college students. The webpage should reflect the data by not showing the Latino first-generation status as an at-risk detriment to success, but rather one that can be cultivated as a strength. Students in the study consistently shared a sense of pride about being a first-generation college student, and that holding the identity motivated them to succeed in order to show family, peers, and those beyond the ethnic group that Latinos were academically capable. Institutions should include videos on the website that captures this population’s academic approach, pride and motivational outlook.

**Latino honor society.** Another recommendation for practice to facilitate Latino first-generation college educational resilience is to implement an honor society geared at this group. The honor society should recognize these students’ academic achievements and commitment to their academics. Support for instituting such a practice originates from findings related to peers, which explained that engaging with like-minded peers who approached the academic experience from a similar lens and attitude, helped Latino first-generation college students achieve educational resilience. Seventeen students explained that they demonstrated educational resilience because they received verbal and non-verbal messages from Latino first-generation college students that academic success was attainable, shared books, or attended to each other’s needs. Thus, having an honor
society would be a space where like-minded Latino first-generation college students could purposely gather, connect and seek support. Also, creating an honor society is a way to recognize first-generation students’ academic efforts and achievement, and retain them. Considering the first-generation research, it is important that institutional communities establish Latino first-generation students’ academic success in the campus culture and history.

**Culturally-competent faculty and staff.** Given that nine study participants indicated faculty influenced their educational resilience, the findings support and emphasize the need to have faculty and staff who are knowledgeable, capable and competent to work with Latino first-generation students. This study is no different, and in fact, how students described internalizing faculty support into academic motivation validates the need to hire faculty and staff who are culturally competent. Implementing such hiring practices are important to have faculty and staff who support these students’ identities to aid them in achieving their academic goals. Given these findings, along with other research, the recommendation is that postsecondary education institutions continue to strive to increase hire and train staff to support students’ persistence and their educational resilience. Similar to the way institutions drive the direction from which to approach students, so to do faculty and staff. Institutions should not presume that faculty and staff approach Latino students, in particular, from a strength rather than deficit perspective.

**Latino living and learning community.** Another way institutions can facilitate educational resilience within Latino first-generation students is to establish a living
learning community. Taking all the present study’s findings into consideration—parents’ working-class background influence, peer support, and the positive significance of faculty validation, the importance of having one space that embraces and addresses all of their needs is clear. This living learning community is important to show a commitment to their identity and allow Latino first-generation college students to react, process and embrace in solitude or with a like-minded support system. Establishing such a space allows Latino first-generation college students to wholly integrate their background into their academic experience.

This living learning community could serve as a support group geared at Latino first-generation college students. It could provide these students the opportunity to meet parallel peers to discuss problems, concerns, successes, and goals. The living learning community could be based on a first-generation college student social and academic identity, or characteristics to present and discuss. Both would help to facilitate these students’ coping skills, and ability to achieve and enable their educational resilience. The recommendation is that within the group, Latino first-generation students will be exposed to peers’ attitudes, perceptions, and academic behaviors and learn new insights about the ways they can interact and engage as college students.

Another component to this recommendation is to facilitate educational resilience by hiring resident assistants, faculty, and staff who self-identify as former Latino first-generation college students. Institutions can serve as allies in arranging, establishing and enhancing, Latino first-generation college student peer connections, which this study found to be instrumental in facilitating educational resilience. This is important because
in having full-time staff and faculty who identify with this group at the institution increases academic validation to an even greater degree. The aforementioned belief is one that this study’s findings identified as instrumental to setting this group’s educational resilience in motion.

A living learning community also complements the Latino first-generation college student honor society described in the above section. This proactive approach by the institution may help those within the population who are not achieving educational resilience. A living learning community, centered on the Latino first-generation college student identity, allows students from this group who self-identify to be exposed to others with various class standing and majors within an institution. This recommendation is supported by findings, specifically framed using Bronfenbrenner’s framework, that these groups draw on various communities and systems to facilitate educational resilience goals.

**Peer-centered programming.** Specifically within this living learning community for Latino first-generation college students, the findings from this study about peers’ influence on achieving or facilitating educational resilience suggests a need for peer-centered initiatives. For example, 17 students in the present study avidly stressed that speaking, observing, and role modeling their behavior after their peers aided them in facilitating educational resilience. Thus, a suggestion is that this living learning community set up an equal exchange among all Latino students whereby they could co-advice one another about how they achieved their educational resilience. This is an opportunity for students similar to those in this study to discover that they have as much
academic capital, knowledge, and ability as their peers who are second or third
generation college students.

Specifically, Latino first-generation college students would be encouraged to
share academics, social engagement, and career exploration strategies that aid in their
educational resilience. Creating opportunities for this population to share with parallel
peers the fundamental actions they learned or observed in relation to career, academic
and institutional engagement, motivates an internal understanding that they have the
ability, and capability to learn and enact the behaviors described by their peers. The
purpose of recommending such an implication for practice is to extend peer learning
explicitly to include discussion on race and class, as a way to persuade students that these
two social components can be positively internalized to achieve educational resilience.

These recommendations for practice were compiled from Latino first-generation
college students’ descriptions of the behaviors and actions they drew or acted on to
achieve educational resilience. Of particular importance in these approaches is that Latino
first-generation college students lead the framework for discussion and that their stories
and voices be placed at the center. This calls for a move away from what faculty and staff
have learned, been taught, or instructed regarding working with these students and
allowing for peers to teach, role model, and speak to peers from their voice and
experience. Programming from this context gives Latino first-generation undergraduate
students opportunities to observe and imitate academic approaches from peers with
similar backgrounds.

At all levels, the findings show Latino first-generation students self-identify their
risk factors as resources to be tapped into and utilized within all departments, and as a tool to serve these students in a variety of ways. Given this knowledge, the living learning group’s focus is to provide this population an opportunity to process career and academic decision-making as an ongoing experience through an interactive and supportive group approach. The group should also involve career-related group activities that introduce and engage them in community learning and explore career options. For example, doing an activity where students and facilitators exchange résumés and provide feedback would be a beneficial learning experience for students and faculty alike. Another suggestion would be to incorporate Latino alumni and do a job site visit or job shadowing day.

Given the minimal support Latino first-generation college students may be able to draw from parents, and given their parents’ careers, engaging with peers may give these students an opportunity to self-identify or facilitate personal strength through the common experiences and/or lessons shared by individuals of similar backgrounds. The aim is that such a group will enable other group members to better understand and positively internalize internal conflicts and obstacles as experiences they can overcome, in order to motivate them to achieve their academic goals.

**Tutoring center.** Another institutional recommendation is supported by researchers who advocate for creating assessment instruments designed specifically for use with Latino populations (Carlo, Carranza, & Zamboanga, 2002). Parents’ work ethic is a dominant theme that all 19 educationally resilient participants mentioned which emerged from the present study and has institutional implications for practitioners. Study
analysis identified that Latino first-generation college students internalized their parents’ work ethic, which can be utilized at the institutional level. These findings provide postsecondary education institutions with useful and important insight from which to aid these students in achieving and/or facilitating educational resilience. In response to these researchers’ recommendation and findings from the present study, the recommendation for practice is that a tutoring center should develop assessments or diversify intake forms to capture the language that Latino first-generation students use to describe their undergraduate experience. The language that students use to express their academic approach offers emotional and psychological content, which can be used to tutor and support students’ academic wellness.

What can be of particular use to tutoring centers in postsecondary education institutions is how these students’ adapted their parents’ work ethic into successful academic behaviors and approaches, continually coping with academic struggles and hardships. For example, students described studying a “double shift” or “studying every day of the week,” which are working-class behaviors their parents implemented. Given that students mirrored their academic work ethic after their parents’ work ethic, it is important to take into consideration that this approach is successful for educationally resilient Latino first-generation college students and should not be considered a deficit.

Being aware of this population’s academic approach will help to support conversations with students who have a similar academic work ethic as a way to connect, and counsel them about their academic workload. Also, for students in which framing their work ethic after their parents is not leading them academic success, a tutoring center
can use these findings on work ethic as a basis for understanding and connecting to students, and then working to facilitate new forms of identifying successful study behaviors. The findings make it reasonable to understand that for some Latino first-generation college students this approach was effective, considering they are graduating. However, it is also important for institutions to be aware of the various academic approaches students enact, so that institutions can promptly react and serve students when their technique is not effective.

Tutoring center administrators can utilize the meaning students in this study gave to such ideologies associated with work and particularly their parents’ work ethic. This study provides conventional communication that can be incorporated within intake forms and assessments, which may enhance support for students’ learning. The aim would be to assist the tutoring center to differentiate treatments offered to students by interconnecting ethnic and cultural backgrounds of clients from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This is important to increase the validity of intake results and to develop tutoring practices specifically advantageous to this group. Another important implication is to communicate this new language and practice to enable faculty and staff who may refer or require students to go to the tutoring center. Faculty and staff need to be educated so they can have the self-awareness to work and prompt students to reach out and go to the tutoring center.

**Faculty and staff orientations.** Along the line of understanding background and language, a recommendation for practice is that institutions incorporate a cultural competency workshop into faculty and staff orientation. This workshop would train full-
time staff about Latino first-generation college students and their working-class background. This suggestion stems from the emphasis that the present study’s Latino first-generation college students placed on their parents’ working-class background, and its influence on achieving educational resilience. Carothers (2001) called for better understanding and identification of student learning needs; therefore, educators should strive to identify, listen to, understand and make use of the insight this present study identified about working-class views. A stronger consciousness about students’ backgrounds may lead to faculty and staff supporting and engaging students in a way that helps them to achieve or facilitate educational resilience.

Also, the findings from this study present a demand for postsecondary education administrators, faculty, practitioners and students to engage in dialogue about the meaning of social class and how it intersects with cultural identity in and out of the classroom (Borrego, 2004). Specifically, findings demonstrate that social class within a working-class background is most salient for Latino first-generation college students. Consequently, a recommendation for practice would be to train full-time staff about social class competency and language differences that may arise when engaging with parents and students. Most importantly, full-time staff should be trained on how social class shapes the questions, reactions, and interactions they will have with students and parents. This is important in developing curriculum, programming, and overall teaching and serving Latino first-generation college students.

Considering the significance parents’ work ethic and background had on positively facilitating these students’ educational resilience, it is important to align
communication styles with students’ background. This is important to engage parents and students, for example, during an orientation session given that it is their first immersion into college culture. Researchers have stressed “language used by campus administrators is vitally important to the messages given to the campus community” (Borrego, 2004, p. 63). For example, part of that process may include incorporating working-class language that may engage students and parents. By giving regard to language used during full-time staff orientation sessions, institutions are working to retain Latino first-generation college students’ and parents’ social capital by minimizing confusion in language and academic terms that are often used at the postsecondary education level. Providing full-time faculty and staff such a training sets the expectation that in their positions, they should partner with other full-time and part-time staff in ways that cultivate and execute programs and services that facilitate these students’ educational resilience.

**First-generation parent orientation program.** Orienting faculty and staff to Latino first-generation college students and their backgrounds is especially important and effective for those who work in orientation session roles. This present study found that for all 19 Latino first-generation college students, parental support is important and salient for them during their undergraduate experience. Considering these findings, a recommendation for practice is that portions of first-year parent orientations be developed specifically for Latino first-generation college students and their families. This orientation would offer Latino first-generation college students’ parents additional orientation events that connect to and engage them in their students’ academic experience. The reasoning stems from understanding that first-generation parents may
need additional resources and information to develop their framework as parents of Latino first-generation college students, and to facilitate their engagement and understanding of the higher educational community. This, in turn, may facilitate Latino first-generation college students’ educational resilience.

Thus, the purpose of this program would be to more strongly incorporate parents into the college transition to enhance their connection and communications between students, other parents, and institutions. These types of additional parent orientation sessions would be offered within their students’ first academic semester, and a first-generation parent’s day celebration would conclude the orientation period. Additional orientation sessions on financial aid, academic expectations, or building relationships with faculty may be offered. These sessions could be led by first-generation faculty, staff, or co-lead by senior status Latino/a first-generation college students.

The orientation session for Latino first-generation parents may develop support and understanding about their role and how they can make a positive impact on their students’ academic experience. The sessions are a place where parents can build relationships with faculty and staff, and role model to their students the importance and significance that engaging in such behavior can have on the academic experience. A program such as this is the foundation to welcome, and invite parents into the academic process to be more active and informed in their college students’ academic journey.
Summary

In summary, the results of this study examining Latino first-generation college students’ educational resilience lead me to recommend that institutions and practitioners redirect the manner in which they are serving these students. Findings from this study call for institutional recommendations for practice to progress toward targeting Latino first-generation college students. The findings indicate that all of a student’s identity, relationships and environmental contexts facilitate or help them achieve educational resilience. Thus, based on these findings institutional practices should be not only holistic, but also encompass environmental communities and people beyond a university community, such as parents, alumni, and employers. Similarly, future research recommendations offered below move toward examining content areas in which Latino first-generation college students are minimally researched, in order to expand understanding of this population.

Recommendations for Future Research

This present study’s results inform how Latino first-generation college students achieve and facilitate educational resilience, and persist to achieving their undergraduate degree. Given these findings, recommendations for future research focus on expanding educational resilience research within postsecondary education institutions and among this population. Research examining the educational resilience phenomenon among Latino first-generation college students is useful because it draws out findings about how these students utilize external and internal resources to internalize positive achievement or facilitation of educational resilience. The research shows the heterogeneity in internal
and external resources that Latino first-generation college students draw on to circumvent academic and social barriers as they academically persist.

Identifying how Latino students internalize external and internal resources to aid in their pursuit of postsecondary education degree is consequential because it focuses on how Latino first-generation college students retain an internal resource that empowers them to persist and achieve their degree. In using this present study’s findings as a catalyst, the following recommendations for future research are expounded below. Conversely, yielding the awareness and descriptions offered by the students, future research overall should include more qualitative and quantitative studies with larger sample sizes, and be expanded in the following areas.

**Institutional Type**

Given the minimal amount of research on the educational resilience of Latino first-generation college students, one research recommendation is that more research studies on this population be conducted across all institution types, state, private or religious institutions. Although educational resilience is minimally researched overall across institution types, fewer are conducted at private religious institutions. The findings in this study provide cause for further understanding how Latino/a students utilize and internalize their first-generation identity as a positive resource at small religious institutions, to achieve and/or facilitate educational resilience. Future research on Latino/a first-generation college students should examine how educational resilience varies among this population, and with the various postsecondary educational institutions they attend. Also, the need to examine educational resilience at various institutional sizes
stems from the knowledge that diversity and support systems vary from institution to institution, thus it would be helpful to see how educational resilience varies, if at all, based on institution type.

**Continual Coping**

Another research direction should examine *continual coping* among Latino first-generation college students. In this study, students described *continually coping*, such as embracing academic stress, pain and struggles as a form of enabling their educational resilience. Thus, I propose that research further explore how Latino first-generation college students utilize continual coping to attain educational resilience. Researching continual coping is important to provide awareness about its impact on Latino first-generation college students’ academic approach (emotional and social) and study skill strategies approaches. In particular, given the number of students who identified continual coping as a normalized academic strategy demonstrates it is vital to develop approaches for those students for which continual coping is not an effective tool. For example, for those students who believe they must “suffer” through academic struggles, an institutional practice that is a collaborative between two institutional units might be beneficial.

It is important for future research to identify how Latino first-generation college students utilize continual coping to develop learning and behavior modifications that help facilitate their educational resilience. This research could help enhance continual coping for those in which it is a useful resource. However, for students in which continual coping is an adverse approach, future research findings may provide insight
about why students need to make cognitive, academic and social modifications in order for them to achieve educational resilience.

The purpose of advancing research on continual coping among Latino first-generation college students is to provide a holistic understanding of the behavior and approach in higher education. Advancing research on continual coping is especially important because all 19 students described it as a behavior that helped them achieve educational resilience.

**Hard Work Ethic**

In conjunction with institutional type and continual coping research, more research needs to examine the concept of hard work ethic among Latino first-generation college students. Given that all 19 participants mentioned it, research should examine such questions as: “Is hard work a form of self-efficacy for Latino first-generation college students? How, if at all, is hard work ethic uniquely defined, described and internalized by Latino first-generation college students in their strive for a college degree? Does the ideology associated with a hard work ethic for Latino first-generation college students distinguish those who persist from those that do not?” Gaining more insight into Latino first-generation students’ ideology of how a hard work ethic impacts their persistence is important to identify how background and culture impacts their educational resilience and persistence in unique ways.
Financial Aid

A separate recommendation is that researchers examine how financial aid, particularly student loans, facilitates educational resilience among Latino first-generation college students. Researching financial aid is especially critical, given that 15 of the 19 study participants mentioned it as a motivating factor without prompting from the researcher. Financial aid was a most salient influence for students regarding why and how students persisted. All 15 participants described embracing debt to achieve a postsecondary education degree, as a contributor to achieving educational resilience. These Latino first-generation college students described applying for and accepting debt as a form of empowerment because it was a concrete incentive for them to persist and achieve their degree.

Although the present study did not intend to examine tuition and student loans, the overwhelming number of students who mentioned the topics made it impossible not to include the findings or not encourage future research. The rationale for not examining income was to place more emphasis on how students overcome non-monetary challenges. However, recognizing that incurring student loan debt positively influenced these Latino first-generation college students’ educational resilience, calls for further research to be done between the two topics to advance understanding.

Immigration

One important finding and area for future research involves immigration. Specifically, research should explore how Latino first-generation college students draw on and/or are enabled by family and friend’s undocumented immigration status and
immigration perceptions to achieve educational resilience. The suggestion to explore immigration within the educational resilience phenomenon is derived from eighteen student participants’ unsolicited, yet passionate and relevant comments about immigration. Respondents expressed that the overall immigration views of family and friends strongly influenced their desire to persist. Students described that family and friends,’ and negative dialogue about Latinos and immigration angered them; yet it inspired them to overcome adversity.

For example, students conveyed that they persisted to role model and show the following: Latinos’ positive contributions to American society, that immigration is a piece of the Latino experience, and to prove that Latinos can achieve a postsecondary degree. Exploring how immigration influences these students’ educational resilience is a pathway to understanding how Latino first-generation college students positively internalize immigration. This research should be conducted within the perspective that immigration status, for these students, is considered a deficit—something they must overcome because of the challenges they have seen the identity create for family and friends, and the negative dialogue within American society and politics.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Framework**

Next, this study supports further examining Latino first-generation college students using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework, for it provides valuable findings about the various environments that influence this population’s educational resilience. Cabrera and Padilla (2004) positioned “for those of us interested in assisting Latino students to succeed, we need to recognize that the assistance students need begins very
early in life and continues for a very long time” (p. 169). Bronfenbrenner’s framework allowed for a richer understanding of findings in this study, particular when examining first-generation status, which spans students’ lifetime. For example, findings identified that Latino first-generation educational resilience is enabled from the various environments they inhabit over the course of their life (proximate and distant) such as their parents’ work ethic and first-generation identity. Thus, the study offers an alternative framework that may help college and university administrators, student affairs professionals, and faculty better understand the educational resilience of Latino first-generation college students. However, this study is solitary in its examination, and more research is needed to provide consistency and a description of the environments from which these students draw on to achieve or facilitate educational resilience.

Overall, future research needs to work towards identifying forms of educational resilience behaviors that can be learned and/or sustained to enable Latino/a first-generation college students to persist. The focus should be on Latinos’ approach for managing their first-generation identity as college students. In doing so researchers would recognize that students have a foundation for executing and enabling educational resilience, given their roles as college students. In acknowledging that support for these students has been longitudinal and over their lifetime, researchers may be better equipped to identify how to shape and enable educational resilience (and encourage students to do the same) from the various environmental systems they deem significant.

Studying the Latino first-generation college student population within this framework established the importance of examining identities and communities that
begin prior to or are not related to postsecondary educational. The present study established that just as Latino/as are a heterogeneous group in ethnicity, they are also diverse in regards to the resources they draw on to achieve educational resilience. Also, the present study drew attention to examining the developing individual and their longitudinal background. Bronfenbrenner’s model may not only identify conclusions, but also provide understanding of the motives behind the development of the outcomes.

Future studies need to build on Bronfenbrenner’s emphasis on interpersonal relationships and expand research about how Latino/a first-generation college students’ parents are the roots of their academic approach and persistence. It is important to examine these students’ educational resilience more broadly and contextualized in their whole life rather than a certain point.

Finally, what is left to gain from future studies that utilize Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model is the influence various Latino/a first-generation college students’ relationships and environments have on their college student development, which leads to their persistence and educational resilience. Taken as a whole, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model is useful in postsecondary educational research to explore how relationships, environments (internal and external to postsecondary communities), larger social structure, and communities influence college students’ development in order to ensure they persist to graduation and achieve educational resilience.
Summary of Future Research

Further researching educational resilience and persistence among Latino first-generation students allows for a retrieval of better understanding of this population. Given the growth of the Latino population, yet the low numbers that are attaining a degree, there is a compelling need for research that will enhance institution practitioners’ and scholars’ understanding of this population in order to enable their persistence. As proven by this study, research on educational resilience provides concrete methods that Latino first-generation students build, utilize, and enable their own persistence.

Limitations and Strengths

This study’s limitations are consistent with what was outlined in chapter 3, but new limitations emerged over the course of executing and analyzing findings from the data. This section describes limitations to be considered for relating the findings to similar or non-parallel populations. Also discussed are strengths that the researcher identified while conducting the study.

For example, a study of 19 Latino first-generation college students cannot reasonably be applied to non-Latino students or first-generation college students in general. Also, the students’ backgrounds limit the ability to reasonably relating these findings to other Latino first-generation college students, for students in this study were predominately from the Midwest, low-income, Mexican-American and were of junior or senior standing.

Another limitation is institution type. Given that the research was conducted at a religious, private, predominantly White institution, findings should be circumspectly
applied to similar populations. This includes minimally applying findings, considering tuition amount, given that tuition at the present study’s research site averaged $40,000. When considering tuition, applying findings to a broad Latino first-generation college student population are limited in generalizability because tuition cost varies across institutions as do students’ opinion about the expense. Considering these factors, findings should be carefully applied to similar populations who attend institutions with considerably less financial responsibilities.

Transitioning into the strengths, the researcher found her position as a Latina first-generation Ph.D. student at the institution where the study was conducted, allowed for the development of familiarity and immediate rapport with research participants. As a result, the research has a clear insider’s understanding of the campus environment, community and organization. Having a strong shared experience is important to evaluate students’ practice of a phenomenon (Lincoln, 2013), which in this case is educational resilience. A particular strength that emerged was the empathy and understanding that the interviewees and researcher had for one another, which produced an immediate rapport for discussing being a Latino first-generation college student at the research site.

The researcher’s similar group membership facilitated collecting textual and structural descriptions of implementing, developing, and enabling educational resilience. Gathering such information is important to cultivate a strong interpretation of Latino first-generation college students’ inner thoughts about educational resilience. Lincoln (2013) posited that such an approach leads to policy and practice advances.

Research identified that “same-ethnicity data collectors should be employed in
research projects where personal contact is involved” (Marin & Van Oss-Marin, 1991, p. 53). Participants were candid and forthcoming with the researcher about their personal thoughts, experiences, and understanding of their Latino first-generation identity. The strength in sharing ethnicity with participants was significant. As Marin and Van Oss-Marin (1991) posited, the interaction between the two “can enhance rapport, [the] willingness to disclose, and the validity and reliability of the data provided” (p. 53). The researcher reasons that being a member of the Latino and first-generation community further enhanced the data collection process as evidenced by the students’ vulnerability in responding to the questions.

An overall strength of the study is drawn from all 19 students’ sharing with the researcher that they were pleased to have been asked to discuss their experiences as Latino first-generation college students. Specifically, students welcomed the opportunity to be directly asked about their college experience, which was contextualized in being Latino and first-generation college students. Some of the students took a great pause in answering the questions because they said they had never thought so deeply about being a Latino first-generation college students, while others reflected on it very often. Regardless of the time spent reflecting on the identity, all students said that they were happy to have the opportunity to process their Latino first-generation college student experiences as juniors and seniors. For seniors, who were graduating within a month of being interviewed, participating in the present research study gave them the space to recall and process all they had been through and achieved over the years. However, for the juniors responding to the present research study’s request for reflection prompted
excitement and gratitude as they moved into their senior year. All students voiced appreciation for having the opportunity to share their understanding of their Latino first-generation college experience.

**Personal Reflections**

As the researcher, I thought it essential to include a personal reflection about conducting this study given my self-identification as a Latino first-generation college student. For a researcher to position herself in the study is important in order to share with readers what prompted the research, personal gain, and to whom the research is being reported (Wolcott, 2010). Thus, this reflection allows me to describe my pathway and experience of conducting this study.

As an undergraduate student, I would have qualified to join. I wanted to make sure that I revealed and expanded on any biases that may have evolved to ensure that the study placed the student at the center rather than the investigator. Centering the study on students is important, for Creswell (2013) stated that executing a qualitative study requires providing multiple perspectives on a topic and participants diverse views. Thus, it was important to maintain focus on learning the meaning participants made of educational resilience, not the researcher.

From the dissertation’s proposal phase, I have been transparent that the energy and passion to conduct this study emerged from my personal striving to persist as a Latina first-generation Ph.D. student. As a student, I encountered my own personal challenges being the solitary Latina Ph.D. student in my program. Consequently, through discernment and self-awareness, I contemplated, “If my educational background,
professional and life experience contributed to my struggle socially and academically, how do undergraduate students at the research site (with similar backgrounds) achieve academic degrees?” Thus, I decided to move forward by researching Latino first-generation college students.

I was determined to not research this population from a deficit model. I thought it was important to research them from an affirmative perspective, to explore how despite their academic and social vulnerability characteristics, Latino first-generation college students successfully approached their drive for a postsecondary education degree. Also, I wanted to recognize the first-generation identity, given that large portions of Latino college students hold the identity. Educational resilience allowed for this consideration, and Bronfenbrenner’s framework, allowed for seeing the past, present and future communities that students engage in for the evaluation and research process. Broadening the population that is examined within an educational resilience framework, and applying Bronfenbrenner’s framework to this group, allows for a holistic consideration (specifically beyond the institutional environment) of people and communities that influence these students’ persistence. Thus, the foundation and framework for the study emerged.

However, using an educational resilience framework created a challenge because minimal research within postsecondary education literature exists that examines Latino first-generation college students. Using this framework was ambitious, but I was determined to examine Latino students using a framework that specifically considered and categorized their first-generation status. I wanted students to critically process being
part of the group, and also research their self-described efforts to achieve a college degree. I envisioned students stating that parents, friends, and teachers would contribute, but had no idea what internal resources they would describe as helping them achieve their degree. The students’ internal descriptions of such personal factors as hard work, continual coping, and Latino first-generation status were the most powerful findings because although minimal research exists examining their educational resilience within higher education, they corroborated and enhanced the existing research.

Therefore, when I was conducting interviews I was motivated and excited that my research project was being substantiated. As the researcher, I felt relieved because I had developed this project based on what I was internally drawn to, and I feared it would not relate to current literature or yield usable findings. However, during the students’ interviews, I found parallels between students’ responses and research. My approach to developing this research project stemmed from my experience as a new Ph.D. student. People advised me to select a topic that would remain interesting for as long as it took me to complete. In taking the advice, I did worry that the project would not yield beneficial outcomes.

Given that I was conscious that I was personally connected to the research project, I was compelled to ensure that the project be about research participants, and not my own personal experience as an undergraduate or Ph.D. student. I continuously compartmentalized my personal experiences and relations to the subject through journaling and speaking with mentors to process the interviewees. In addition, I identified elements where my undergraduate journey and background was different than
interviewees, such as institution type, geography, parents’ immigration status, institutional tuition, student body and age. In creating such separation, it allowed me to research and students as individuals rather than part of a categorized group. During the process it was important for me that participants’ individual stories be obtained and heard to eliminate research bias.

However, on a daily basis I was prompted to reflect on my own experience as a Latina first-generation Ph.D. student. Through this experience I recognized the importance of identifying as a Latina and the implications it would have on research because of my strong connection to my ethnic identity and drive to examine that population. This research experience solidified within me a desire and comfort in wanting to qualitatively share the experiences of populations within Latino, first-generation, low-income, state and/or religious institutions during my career. This experience only enhanced my membership with the above groups and empowered me to persist as Latina Ph.D. student.

A most influential moment of the project was in the interview I had with Miguel, who when asked how he felt being a first-generation student shaped his experience (given his parents did not have a college degree), he responded by saying that “it was good because they’re [parents] not controlling.” Through three degrees at three different institutions, I never thought of my first-generation status as freeing or liberating. As a student, throughout my Ph.D. experience, I was bombarded with feelings of academic inadequateness and under-preparedness. However, Miguel’s words modified my perspective.
I aspire that administrators, faculty, staff and students learn from this research study—that we should look beyond that categorizations we place on this population and support them to believe and understand that being a Latino/a first-generation college student is a limitless position to hold with infinite opportunity.
APPENDIX A

STUDENT RECRUITMENT E-MAIL
Dear [Insert Student Name],

My name is Diana Chavez and I am a Ph.D. graduate student at Loyola University Chicago. I am conducting a research study on Latino first-generation college students who are scheduled to graduate in spring or summer 2013 from Loyola University Chicago. The study intends to explore how Latino first-generation students attained academic success and reached the point of graduation. In order to gain understanding, the study will ask for descriptions about non-cognitive and external sources that students used throughout their undergraduate career to achieve educational resilience and persist.

I am contacting you because, Mr./Ms./Mrs./Dr. [Insert Name], identified you as a potential student participant based on your background. Participation in the study includes a maximum of a 120 minute individual interview. Prior to the individual interview, a demographic questionnaire and consent form will be given to you to read, review and sign, in order to qualify and secure your participation. Following your consent to participate, an appointment for the individual interview will be scheduled for the following two weeks. Light refreshments will be provided, and interviews will be held at Loyola University Chicago.

Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Also, all information provided will remain with the researcher and only shared with the dissertation chair, if needed. If you choose to not participate in the study, your academic
experience at Loyola University Chicago or relationship with Mr./Ms./Mrs./Dr. will not be affected. Participating in this study is independent of Loyola University Chicago and does not affect your academic or social relationships.

Finally, the research derives from the researcher herself, who successfully achieved a post-secondary degree despite having parents who did not attain a college degree. Therefore, the research aims to attain descriptions of how students, who may be vulnerable to not attaining a college degree because of their first-generation status, succeed. The finding will provide the higher education community with greater understanding of the student population. If you are interested in participating, please call Diana Chávez at (512)736-0036 or e-mail dchavez@luc.edu. Also, please forward this solicitation letter to peers you consider eligible to participate. Thank you for your consideration, and I wish you the best as you complete your undergraduate degree.

Best,

Diana Chávez

Doctoral Candidate

Loyola University Chicago
APPENDIX B

STUDENT PARTICIPANT SURVEY
Name: ________________________ Desired Pseudonym: ________________________

Sex: _______ Age: _______ Race/ethnicity: ________________________

Major: _______________ Minor: ___________ G.P.A. _______________

Hometown: ________________________ Phone Number: _______________

E-mail address: __________________________________________________________

Mother’s Education Level (circle one):

No High School  High School Associate’s degree  Associate’s Degree

Father’s Education Level (circle one):

No High School  High School Associate’s degree  Associate’s Degree

Do you have siblings in college?  Yes  or  No

If, Yes, how many? ______

Do you identify as a first-generation student?  Yes  or  No

What year did you enroll into Loyola University Chicago? ______

What is your expected graduation year? ______
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT
Title of study: Educational resilience among Latino first-generation students – Influence of internal and external sources on persistence

Principal investigator: Diana Chávez

Institute: Loyola University Chicago

Purpose of the research study:

I am Diana Chávez from the Higher Education Program, at Loyola University Chicago and I am leading this qualitative research project. The purpose of the study is to gain descriptions of how Latinos, overcome the risk factors of being a first-generation student, and utilize internal and external factors to persist to the point of graduation. The rational for conducting the study is to use the information to provide insight about factors that impact persistence. This will help to develop prevention and intervention strategies that describe how Latinos rely on internal and/or external sources to help them achieve a post-secondary degree.

Procedures

The researcher will interview students on a one-on-one basis. Specifically, the researcher will question students about what sources affected his/her persistence as they acted to achieve a degree. All information provided will be kept strictly confidential, and will only be used to establish how certain factors influenced persistence. Also, students are asked if he/she is willing to be contacted at a later date if clarifications are needed for responses given during the interview. Follow-up requires students providing a phone number and/or an email address. All personal information provided
will be kept confidential and separate from interview data, and kept on file for the duration of the study (January 2013 – January 2014). At the conclusion of the research project, personal information on paper or on a computer will be shredded or deleted.

**Possible risks or benefits**

There is no risk involved to you for participating in this study. There may or may not be a direct benefit to you from participating in the study. However, the results of the study may help to formulate guidelines for developing and initiating further understanding about Latino first-generation students’ persistence, and the role that educational resilience has within that context.

**Cost**

The study is conducted at no cost to you.

**Payment Participation**

Students will not receive any monetary or other type of compensation for participation in the study.

**Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal**

You are free to choose to participate in the study. You may refuse to participate in the study without any loss of benefit, at any time. Your decision not to participate or withdraw from the study will not affect your role as a Loyola undergraduate student. Also, if the researcher deems it in your best interest to withdraw you from the study, she will remove you without your consent. The research will inform you about any new information, that may come available, which will affect your participation in the study.
Confidentiality

The information provided by you will remain confidential. The information gathered in this research study may be published or presented in public forums, but your name and other identifiable information will not be used or revealed. However, your participation in the study may be made known to Loyola University Chicago’s - Institutional Review Board and/or Dr. Bridget Turner Kelly, dissertation supervisor. The investigator pledges not to share your personal information or identity with anyone else than those identified in this section.

Available Sources of Information

If you have further questions contact Principal Investigator (Diana Chávez), at the following phone number 512-736-0036.

1. Student Authorization

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research study with the primary investigator. Also, I have had my questions answered by her in the language I understand. The risk and benefits were explained to me. I understand that a copy of this consent form will be given to me I sign it. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and that I may choose to withdraw at any time. I freely agree to participate in this research study. I understand that information regarding my personal identity will be kept confidential, except with those indicated in this form.
Please initial next to each statement below, indicating your agreement to participate in the study, within the following parameters:

- [ ] I consent to participate in the research study “Educational Resilience among Latino first-generation students – influence of sources on persistence.”
- [ ] I consent to participate in one individual interview
- [ ] I consent to being contacted at a later time for any clarification required in my responses.
- [ ] I consent to providing my name, address, and phone number to the researcher.
- [ ] By signing this consent form, I have not waived any legal rights that I have as a student in a research study.

Student Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________

Student Printed Name: ________________________________________________

Research Staff: I, the undersigned, have fully explained the relevant details of this research study to the student named above, and believe that the student understands and knowingly give his/her consent.

Printed Name: ___________________________ Date: ____________

Signature: ___________________________

Role in the Study: ___________________________
APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS
Script:

Hello, thank you for coming and I appreciate your participation! As mentioned in the information letter, the purpose of this study is to explore which or what internal resources you utilized throughout your undergraduate career, which resulted in your educational resilience and persistence to the point of graduation. Additionally, questions about how external sources influenced you internally will be asked.

Please be aware, that if at any point you do want to answer a question, please respond with, “I prefer not to answer the question.” Also, if at any time during the interview, you want to stop or withdraw your participation from the study, state it vocally. If you decide to remove yourself from the study, I remind you that all documentation will be destroyed and any information on file will be shredded and all audio will be erased.

Further, any information you shared will not be used in the study.

Do you have any questions? Okay, I am going to start the interview. [Turn on digital audio recorder.]

Rapport Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. How do you describe yourself?

In-depth guided interview – Wide-ranging Questions

Introduction: Hi, my name is Diana Chavez from the Higher Education Program, at Loyola University Chicago. I am conducting this qualitative research project, with the purpose of the gaining from Latino students, descriptions of how they overcome vulnerabilities associated with their first-generation student status, utilizing internal factors to persist to the point of graduation. I myself believe that I utilized internal factors
to persist through my undergraduate and even Ph.D. educational experience. Therefore, as part of my final research project, I want to learn about educational resilience role in Latino first-generation student persistence.

1. What is your earliest awareness of a college degree?

2. Also, when did you first think about attending a higher education institution?

3. Thanks. I would like to learn more about the internal opinions that resulted in your educational journey as a college student. Can you explain how you decided that you would attend college?

Let’s talk more about being a first-generation college student and your experience in that role, during the past four/five years.

4. As a first-generation college student, describe one or a couple of your academic adversities.
   a. What is your experience with academic adversities (i.e. preparation for college courses, low or failing grades, college admission test scores)? Please describe.
   b. Can you give me a concrete example of an academic adversity?
   c. How did you handle the academic adversity? How did you internally process it?

2. As a first-generation college student, describe on or a couple of your academic achievements.
   a. Can you give me a concrete example of an academic achievement?
   b. How did you handle the academic achievement? How did you internally process it?
   c. What were your thoughts about the academic achievements?

3. Let’s talk about adversities? For example, challenges relating to community or public issues. For example, wanting to achieve a higher education degree, not having a role model in your family, and/or coming from a lower-middle
class/improvised neighborhood. As a first-generation college student, what are a couple of adversities you have encountered?
   a. Can you give me a concrete example of an adversity?
   b. How did you handle it? How did you internally process it?
   c. What were your thoughts about the adversity?

In-depth reflection questions

4. Let’s talk about your views. As a first-generation college student, what were your thoughts concerning your attempt to achieve a college degree, prior to enrolling? For example, reflecting on college in relation to: working toward a degree, desire for attending college, future as a college student and after. What it means to achieve a degree? Please describe your viewpoints?

5. How would you describe your thoughts in regards to success, in relation to you working to achieve a college degree? Tell me more.
   a. For example, thoughts on success in relation to: working toward a degree, desire for attending college, and/or life as a college student.

6. How would you describe your reasoning in regards to adversity, in relation to you working to achieve a college degree? Tell me more.
   a. For example, thoughts on adversity in relation to: working toward a degree, desire for attending college, and/or life as a college student.

7. How would you describe your thinking in regards to achieving a college degree? For example, considerations on achieving a degree in relation to: working toward a degree, desire for attending college, and/or your future as a college graduate.

Identifying as at-risk student

8. Thanks. In relation to your first-generation status, did you identify as being an at-risk student? As a result of that recognition, did you identify as at-risk of not achieving a college degree? Tell me more about that.

9. Ok, as a first-generation college student did identifying as a at-risk student help or hurt you in your strive to achieve a college degree? Can you tell me more about that? Is there an example that you can offer to provide further description?
10. You self-identify as a first-generation college student. So, can you describe how identifying as a first-generation college student contextualized your strive to achieve a college degree. Specifically, how did self-identifying as an at-risk student shape your experience? Tell me more about that? Is there an example that you can offer to provide further description?

Parents

11. Let’s talk about your parents. How would you describe your parents’ role, in your life as a first-generation college student?
12. As a first-generation college student, how did your parents, contribute to your internal philosophy about achieving a higher education degree? If you wouldn’t mind, please give me an example.
13. As a first-generation college student, what behaviors, actions or communications did your parents perform, that contributed to your internal philosophy about achieving a higher education degree? If you wouldn’t mind, please give me an example.
14. If you cannot recall any behaviors, actions or communications from your parents that, contributed to your internal philosophy about achieving academic adversities. Why do you think that might be the case?

Mentors

15. I would like to know more about people not related to you – mentors. How would you describe the role of mentors, in your life as a first-generation college student? Please tell me, who is your mentor[s]?
   a. How did these individuals become your mentor[s]?
16. As a first-generation college student, describe how your mentors, contributed to your internal philosophy about achieving academic success. Can you provide a specific example that stands out during your time at Loyola University Chicago?
17. Great, continuing with topic of mentors, I am wondering, as a first-generation college student, how have your mentors not contributed to you overcoming your academic adversities. If you would, please provide a specific example?

Peer Support

18. Now, what about your peers, how would you describe the role of peers, in your life as a first-generation college student?
   a. Who do you consider your peers?
19. Let me ask, as a first-generation college student, can you describe how your peers contributed to you achieving academic success? Great, please describe an example.

20. As a first-generation college student, how did your peers, contribute to your internal philosophy about achieving a higher education degree? If you wouldn’t mind, please give me an example.

21. Ok, now still considering your life as a first-generation college student, how did your peers contribute to you not overcoming academic adversity? If you would, can you describe an instance?
   a. How did your peers hinder you overcoming academic adversities?

Positive self-understanding of racial/ethnic identity

22. In relation to your racial/ethnic identity, how did a positive inner self-understanding of that identity, contribute to you achieving academic success. Specifically, your internal perspective about achieving academic success.
   a. Can you please provide an example? Please tell me more
   b. Are there any examples in your life of you identifying positively as a Latino(a) and that not contributing to your academic success?

23. In relation to your racial/ethnic identity, how did not having a helpful inner self-understanding of that identity, contribute to academic hardships. Specifically, your internal perspective about not achieving academic success.
   a. Can you please provide an example? Tell me more about that.
   b. Are there any examples in your life of not identifying positively as a Latino(a) and that contributing to your academic ability to graduate success?

Cultural Connections

24. In relation to cultural connections (i.e. music, images), how, if at all, has having a cultural connection, contributed to you achieving academic success? Specifically, your internal viewpoint about academic success.
   a. Can you please provide an example? Tell me more about that?

25. In relation to cultural connections (i.e. music, images), how, if at all, did not having cultural connection, contribute to you not achieving academic success. Specifically, your internal viewpoint about not achieving academic success.
   a. Can you please provide an example? Please describe more about that
Co-curricular Activities

26. In relation to co-curricular activities, how, if at all, did being involved, contribute to you achieving academic success. Specifically, your internal thoughts about academic success.
   a. Can you please provide an example? Tell me more about that.

27. In relation to co-curricular activities, how, if at all, did not being involved, contribute to not achieving academic success. Specifically, you internal thoughts about not achieving academic success.
   a. Can you please provide an example? Describe more about that.

Environmental/Institutional Validation

Great, so we have talked about you, your parents, peers, and mentors, now let’s talk about the university environment. How would you describe, the role of campus offices (academic, non-academic offices) and faculty or staff with regard to your life as a first-generation college student?

28. Can you describe, what Loyola academic offices provided you with academic and/or non-academic validation? Can you name some of those offices?

29. In reference to the above question, how, if at all, has the academic or non-academic office(s) validated your desire to achieve higher education degree? Please provide a specific example.

30. That’s great, now as a first-generation college student, how, if at all, did an academic or non-academic office(s) invalidate your ability to overcome an academic adversity? Please provide an example.

31. Can you talk about, a Loyola faculty or staff member, who validated your as a student. Can you name some of those people? Please provide a specific example

32. In reference to the above question, how did the Loyola faculty or staff member validate your desire to achieve higher education degree? Please provide a specific example.

33. In reference to the above question, how did the Loyola faculty or staff member invalidate your desire to achieve higher education degree? Please provide a specific example.
Special Area Question – (Internal Resources)

34. Excellent, you have given me lots of good information. I am wondering, what else would you describe helped you overcome your first-generation position as a college student, during your time at Loyola University Chicago?
35. Also, what else would you describe hindered you overcoming your first-generation identity as a college student?
36. What internal qualities or thoughts do you think served you well in achieving your undergraduate degree?
37. What internal qualities or thoughts not assist you in achieving your undergraduate degree?

Final Question

38. Do you have anything you want to add that we have not talked about, something that you remember while the interview was being conducted, that you wanted to share?

Thank you once more for participating in the study. What is to follow is that I will transcribe the interview. Then I will e-mail you the transcription and ask you to review verify and approve the contents. I appreciate your participation and hope that the interview was a pleasant experience for you. If you have any follow-up questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Enjoy graduation.
REFERENCES


Popay, J., Rogers, A., & Williams, G. (1998). Rationale and standards for the systematic review of qualitative literature in health services research. *Qualitative Health Research, 8*, 341-351.


VITA

Dr. Diana Chavez is from Austin, Texas. Dr. Chavez earned two Bachelor of Arts degrees at Texas State University-San Marcos in Political Science and English. After her undergraduate years, Dr. Chavez worked as a Resident Hall Coordinator at Texas State University-San Marcos. During the last two years of employment, Dr. Chavez earned a Master’s of Educational Administration from the University of Texas at Austin.

Dr. Chavez was hired by The University of Texas at Austin as Assistant Director of the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence. In this role, Dr. Chavez managed and administrated two retention and persistence programs. The Welcome Program focused on issues of diversity and campus climate, while The UTransition Program academically and socially supported transfer students. This inspired drove Dr. Chavez to pursue a Ph.D. in Higher Education at Loyola University Chicago.

As a doctoral student Dr. Chavez served as a research assistant for Dr. John Dugan’s Multi-institutional Study of Leadership, and Dr. Bridget Turner Kelly’s research on women of color in the academy. Dr. Chavez co-taught Student Development Theory and Student Affairs Professional for Master’s students. She also worked for Achieving College Excellence, a Student Support Services, Department of Education grant-funded program. Dr. Chavez focused on implementing post-undergraduate and graduate school preparation advising, services, and programming.
Dr. Chavez resides in Chicago, Illinois and upon her program completion, will work to engage in the postsecondary community with a professional philosophy to support all students, regardless of race, socioeconomics, and overall background, to achieve a postsecondary degree and engage and contribute to society in their authentic way.