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“The Latina I Envision is Powerful”: A Qualitative Analysis of Identity and Academic
Resilience among Latina College Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology

by

Emily Gabrielle Unzueta

Committee in charge:

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June 2023

The dissertation of Emily Gabrielle Unzueta is approved.

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May 2023

“The Latina I Envision is Powerful”: A Qualitative Analysis of Identity and Academic
Resilience among Latina College Students

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by

Emily Gabrielle Unzueta

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with love and gratitude to my family.

And to all the brown girls who dare to dream. ¡Sí se puede!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation has been the most challenging academic endeavor of my career, and it would have not been possible without the help and support of those around me.

First, to my husband, Eric, who has been my rock every step of the way, I love you. Thank you for holding my hand throughout this process and for helping me get back up after every stumble. Your encouragement, optimism, and confidence in me made all the difference, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

To my mother, you are and will always be the epitome of resilience to me. Thank you for inspiring me every day with your strength, selflessness, and loving devotion. Thank you also for reminding me that God does not give us anything we cannot handle. Although that belief was repeatedly tested over the past few years, like always, you were right.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to the members of my committee. My dissertation took many unexpected turns so to them, I say thank you for your understanding, patience, and continued support. It has been an honor learning from all of you and having you serve on my committee. I want to especially acknowledge my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Melissa Morgan. I would not be here without your guidance, warm encouragement, and unwavering support. Thank you for believing in me and for helping me realize my dreams.

My deepest thanks to my family, friends, and colleagues who lifted me up when I needed it most. I am truly blessed to have you all in my life. Thank you also to the Hosford Research Committee for the Ray E. Hosford Memorial Research Award, which provided me with financial support that aided in the recruitment and analysis of this study. There are many

others who have supported me along this journey. Although I cannot list all of them, I am grateful to each and every one of them.

I want to acknowledge my father, Simón Unzueta, who passed away from cancer on August 2, 2022. Although our relationship was complicated, I loved him, and he loved me. After he died, many of his former students reached out to me and my siblings and spoke about what an amazing teacher he was. They shared that he made a difference in their lives and that he made them feel empowered and proud of our culture. I am not sure if my dad knew what a lasting impact he had on so many of his students so I feel it is important to recognize it here. I am proud of him, and I hope that I can continue his legacy of championing our culture and uplifting Latinx students.

Finally, but certainly not least, to the participants of this study, there are no words to describe the depth of my gratitude, respect, and admiration. Thank you for trusting me with your stories. They are a gift that I will forever keep close to my heart.

VITA OF EMILY GABRIELLE UNZUETA

May 2023

EDUCATION

Ph.D.	Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology, emphasis in Counseling Psychology University of California, Santa Barbara	June 2023
M.A.	Mental Health Counseling Boston College	May 2013
B.A.	Education, emphasis in Human Development Brown University	May 2009

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Supervised Clinician in Training Aug. 2019 – May 2020
California Lutheran University Counseling and Psychological Services

- Completed a 9-month supervised clinical position at a small, private liberal arts and HSI university in Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Provided brief individual therapy to a diverse caseload of 38-43 clients.
- Also engaged in weekly intake assessments, crisis intervention, group therapy, consultation, and outreach.
- Provided 1 hour of supervision to pre-doctoral practicum trainees per week.
- Received weekly supervision, which consists of 2 hours of individual supervision and 2 hours of case conference and group supervision.

Pre-Doctoral Intern Aug. 2018 – July 2019
UCLA Counseling and Psychological Services

- Provided up to 19 clinical service hours per week within a brief treatment setting at a large public university
- Co-led 2 skills-based groups for depression as well as 1 support group for Latinx students.
- Provided 2 hours of triage assessment per week.
- Conducted 2-3 intakes per week and subsumed clients into caseload.
- Trained in ADHD assessment, conducted 1 ADHD evaluation per month, and received 2 hours of supervision per week.
- Supervised a pre-doctoral practicum trainee and received 2 hours of supervision of supervision per week.
- Received 2 hours of individual supervision and 2 hours of group supervision each week from 3 licensed psychologists.

Clinical Supervisor & Outreach Coordinator Sept. 2017 – June 2018

Hosford Counseling & Psychological Services Center

- Monitored practicum students via live streaming video as they conducted intakes and therapy sessions at a community clinic in Goleta, CA.
- Assisted with crisis interventions and consultation with faculty supervisors.
- Completed phone intake screenings with prospective therapy clients.
- Recruited prospective clients and served as a liaison between the clinic and community agencies.
- Organized monthly clinic trainings and community education program.

External Practicum Student

Sept. 2015 – March 2018

New Beginnings Counseling Center

- Provided long- and short-term individual therapy to adult clients at a sliding-scale community counseling center in Santa Barbara, CA.
- Provided referrals and coordinated services with community agencies and treatment centers.
- Received 2 hours of group supervision weekly from a licensed clinical psychologist.

External Practicum Student

Sept. 2014 – June 2015

UCSB Counseling and Psychological Services

- Maintained a weekly caseload of 5-7 clients with a range presenting issues and backgrounds.
- Conducted 6 intake interviews and write-ups during the spring quarter.
- Engaged in weekly didactics and presented case conceptualizations.
- Received 1 hour of individual supervision from a pre-doctoral intern.

External Practicum Student

Sept. 2014 – June 2015

UCSB Alcohol and Drug Program

- Led 18 3-week psychoeducational groups focused on increasing student knowledge and awareness of substance use and teaching risk reduction strategies.
- Conducted alcohol and drug brief assessments with UCSB students each week.
- Received 2 hours of group supervision weekly from a licensed marriage and family therapist.

External Practicum Student

Sept. 2013 – June 2014

Hosford Counseling & Psychological Services Center

- Completed intake interviews and provided child, couples, and individual psychotherapy for outpatient clients.
- Administered therapy assessments including Outcome Questionnaire-45, Outcome Rating Scale, Session Rating Session, and Subjective Well-Being to clients weekly and the Brief Symptom Inventory, Working Alliance Inventory, and Beck Depression Inventory periodically.
- Received 3 hours group supervision weekly from a licensed counseling psychologist.

Clinical Intern

Aug. 2012 – May 2013

Wheelock College Counseling Center

- Provided brief, solution-focused therapy and executed 1 walk-in intake interview per week at a small, private liberal arts in Boston, MA.
- Collaborated with multiple offices to raise awareness about mental health issues and participated in various outreach programming focused on underserved student populations.
- Attended weekly all-staff disposition and clinical case conference meetings as well as Colleges of the Fenway intern seminars.
- Received 3 hours of individual and group supervision weekly from two licensed clinical social workers and a licensed mental health counselor.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor , <i>Introduction to Helping Skills: Theory, Research and Practice</i> Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology University of California, Santa Barbara	Spring 2017
Teaching Assistant , <i>Introduction to Chicana/o Studies – Gender</i> Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies University of California, Santa Barbara	Winter 2017
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Teaching Assistant , <i>Personality Theories: Behavior in Context</i> Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology Boston College	Spring 2012
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Student Representative , <i>Diversity and Equity Committee</i> Gevirtz Graduate School of Education University of California, Santa Barbara	2017 – 2018
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 APA Society of Counseling Psychology (Division 17)
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- Campus Representative** 2015
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PUBLICATIONS

- Morgan Consoli, M.L., Torres, L., **Unzueta, E.**, Meza, D., Sanchez, A., Vázquez, M., & Hufana, A. (2020). Accounts of thriving in the face of discrimination for Latinx undergraduate students. *Journal of Latinos and Education*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2020.1712208>
- Morgan Consoli, M., Consoli, A., Hufana, A., Sanchez, A., **Unzueta, E.**, Flores, I., Vázquez, M., Sheltzer, J., & Casas, J. (2019). “I Feel Like We’re Going Backwards.” Post-presidential election resilience in Latinx community members. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology*, 10(2), 16-33.
<https://doi.org/10.33043/JSACP.10.2.16-33>
- Torres, L., Morgan Consoli, M.L., **Unzueta, E.**, Meza, D., Sanchez, A., & Najar, N. (2019). Thriving and ethnic discrimination: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 47(4), 256-273. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12157>
- Morgan Consoli, M.L. & **Unzueta, E.** (2018). Female Mexican immigrants in the United States: Cultural knowledge and healing. *Women & Therapy*, 41(1-2), 165-179.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2017.1323473>
- Morgan Consoli, M.L. & **Unzueta, E.**, Delucio, K., Llamas, J. (2018). What shade of spirituality?: Exploring spirituality, religiosity, meaning-making and thriving among Latinx undergraduates. *Counseling and Values*, 63(2), 232-253.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/cvj.12090>
- Morgan Consoli, M.L., & **Unzueta, E.** (2017). Marianismo. In A. Wenzel (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Abnormal and Clinical Psychology*. SAGE Publications.

Sanchez, A., Hufana, A., Vázquez, M. D., Morgan Consoli, M. L., Consoli, A. J., Casas, M. J., Vanegas, G., Sheltzer, J., Meza, D., & **Unzueta, E.** (2017). Post-election reactions of Latinx community members in Santa Barbara. Diversity Forum Newsletter, University of California, Santa Barbara.

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Vázquez, M.D., Sanchez, A., Flores, I., Hufana, A., **Unzueta, E.**, Sheltzer, J., Meza, D., Morgan Consoli, M.L., Consoli, A. J. and Casas, J.M. (2018, August). *Resilience in Latinx Communities Post-Trump Election: Themes and Considerations*. Poster presented at American Psychological Association Convention, San Francisco, CA.

Morgan Consoli, M.L., & **Unzueta, E.** (2017, August). *Healing in a new land: Mexican immigrant women's use of cultural beliefs and practices*. Symposium presented at the American Psychological Association Annual Convention, Washington, D.C.

Unzueta, E., Morgan Consoli, M.L., Katz, D., Meza, D., Sanchez, A., Vázquez, M., & Hufana, A. (2017, July). *Latino/a thriving and resilience assessment scale (LTRAS): Scale construction from a social justice perspective*. Paper presented at the Interamerican Congress of Psychology of the Interamerican Society of Psychology, Meridad, Mexico.

Torres, L., Morgan Consoli, M., **Unzueta, E.**, Meza, D., Vázquez, M., Najar, N., & Mata-Greve, F. (2016, September). *Latino/a thriving in the face of discrimination: A mixed methods approach*. Symposium presented at the Biennial Conference of the National Latinx Psychological Association, Orlando, FL.

Unzueta, E., Morgan Consoli, M.L., Meza, D., & Vázquez, M. (2016, September) *Case studies of unauthorized students and resilience: Implications for social justice*. Paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the National Latinx Psychological Association, Orlando, FL.

Unzueta, E., Choi, A., & Bordon, J. (2016, August). *Privileged in the academy: Positioning counseling psychology in current student protests*. Symposium presented at the American Psychological Association Annual Convention, Denver, CO.

Chapman-Hilliard, C., & **Unzueta, E.**, (2016, August). *Perceptions of counseling psychology*. Symposium presented at American Psychological Association Annual Convention, Denver, CO.

Buhin, L., Morgan Consoli, M.L., Grubisic, T., Macukic, F., Mrsic, R., Meza, D., **Unzueta, E.**, & Vázquez, M. (2016, August). *Thoughts on resilience and adversity from Croatian and U.S. Latino/a students: A qualitative study*. Poster presented at the American Psychological Association Annual Convention, Denver, CO.

- Unzueta, E., & Morgan Consoli, M.L.** (2016, August). *A qualitative analysis of international training and engagement among counseling psychology students*. Poster presented at the American Psychological Association Annual Convention, Denver, CO.
- Morgan Consoli, M.L. & **Unzueta, E.** (2016, June). *Mentoría con estudiantes Latino/as*. Paper presented at the Regional Congress of Psychology of the Interamerican Society of Psychology, Rosario, Argentina.
- Morgan Consoli, M.L., Buhin, L., Hershman, K., **Unzueta, E.**, Meza, D., & Delucio, K. (2015, August). *A cross-cultural investigation of national identity, belief in a just world, and resilience*. Poster presented at the American Psychological Association Annual Convention, Toronto, Canada.
- Inman, A., Morgan Consoli, M.L., Rosa-Rodriguez, Y., & **Unzueta, E.** (2015, July). *Community based participatory action research across international cultures*. Symposium presented at the Interamerican Congress of Psychology of the Interamerican Society of Psychology, Lima, Peru.
- Unzueta, E.**, Meza, D., & Morgan Consoli, M.L. (2015, July). *Internationalizing USA psychology training programs: An examination of students' experiences and beliefs*. Paper presented at the Interamerican Congress of Psychology of the Interamerican Society of Psychology, Lima, Peru.
- Morgan Consoli, M.L., **Unzueta, E.**, Delucio, K., Hershman, K., & Noriega, E. (2015, January). *Spirituality, religiosity, and meaning-making: Difference in resilience*. Poster presented at the National Multicultural Conference and Summit, Atlanta, GA.
- Morgan Consoli, M.L., Delucio, K., **Unzueta, E.**, Hershman, K., & Noriega, E. (2014, October). *The Santa Barbara wellness project: Snapshot of a formative evaluation and curriculum reconstruction*. Symposium presented at the Biennial Conference of the National Latinx Psychological Association, Albuquerque, NM.
- Morgan Consoli, M.L., **Unzueta, E.**, Hershman, K., Alfonso, F., Bird, C., Delucio, K., Najar, & Torres, L. (2014, October). *Exploring thriving and discrimination through a qualitative approach*. Symposium conducted at the Biennial Conference of the National Latinx Psychological Association, Albuquerque, NM.
- Morgan Consoli, M.L., **Unzueta, E.**, & Consoli, A.J. (July, 2014). *Latinas in academia: Culturally congruent mentoring*. Paper presented at the Regional Interamerican Congress of Psychology of the Interamerican Society of Psychology, San Salvador, El Salvador.
- Morgan Consoli, M.L., Delucio, K., Hershman, K., **Unzueta, E.**, Noriega, E. & Triplett, M. (2014, April). *An exploration of spirituality and thriving in Latino/a undergraduates*. Poster presented at the Div. 36 Annual Midyear Conference on Psychology, Religion and Spirituality, La Mirada, CA.

Nam, J. S., Frederick, A. F., **Unzueta, E.**, Lee, A. Y., & Liang, B. (2012, August). *It takes two: A qualitative examination of exemplary mentoring relationships*. Poster presented at the American Psychological Association Annual Convention. Orlando, FL.

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<i>Ray E. Hosford Memorial Research Award</i>	2018
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology University of California, Santa Barbara	
<i>Block Grant</i>	2017
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology University of California, Santa Barbara	
<i>Eduardo Escobedo Fellowship</i>	2016
Gevirtz Graduate School of Education University of California, Santa Barbara	
<i>Block Grant</i>	2016
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology University of California, Santa Barbara	
<i>Travel Grant to the American Psychological Association Annual Convention</i>	2016
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology University of California, Santa Barbara	
<i>Block Grant</i>	2015
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology University of California, Santa Barbara	
<i>Student Travel Award to the American Psychological Association Annual Convention</i>	2015
Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity, and Race (Division 45) American Psychological Association	
<i>Block Grant</i>	2014
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology University of California, Santa Barbara	
<i>Graduate Student Researcher Grant</i>	2014
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology	

University of California, Santa Barbara

Student Travel Award to the National Multicultural Conference and Summit 2014
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology
University of California, Santa Barbara

The Hosford Hero Award for Dedication and Professionalism 2014
Hosford Counseling & Psychological Services Center
University of California, Santa Barbara

Block Grant 2013
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology
University of California, Santa Barbara

Graduate Opportunity Fellowship 2013
Graduate Division
University of California, Santa Barbara

Dean's Scholarship for Academic Excellence 2012
Lynch School of Education
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Dean's Scholarship for Contributions to Diversity 2012
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Dean's Scholarship for Contributions to Diversity 2011
Lynch School of Education
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ABSTRACT

“The Latina I Envision is Powerful”: A Qualitative Analysis of Identity and Academic Resilience among Latina College Students

by

Emily Gabrielle Unzueta

Latina students exhibit high levels of academic resilience evidenced by increased rates of educational attainment despite social, cultural, and structural barriers. Although research has identified factors that positively and negatively impact their academic resilience, little attention has been given to the influence of identity. To address this gap in the literature, this qualitative study used an intersectional approach to examine the significance of gender and ethnicity to the academic resilience of Latina college students. Specifically, 15 Latina college students who self-identified as academically resilient participated in semi-structured interviews that explored how their experiences of academic resilience have been shaped by their gender and ethnic identities. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze the data and yielded four themes, including: (a) perceptions of otherness, (b) utilizing cultural resources, (c) having purpose to overcome, and (d) self and identity development. Several subthemes were also identified. Based on the themes, it appeared that Latina students in this study experienced feelings of otherness due to their Latina identity. However, rather than renounce their identities, they leveraged their identities to help them persist and have motivation to overcome. Moreover, participants' sense of self and views about their Latina

identity were enhanced as a result of experiencing and overcoming adversity. Implications for education, clinical practice, and research are offered.

Keywords: academic resilience, identity, Latina, qualitative

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Our country was built on and continues to thrive on its diversity, and there is no doubt that the future of the United States is inextricably linked to the future of the Hispanic community.

– President Barack Obama, 2010

Over the past several decades, there has been growing recognition of the importance of Latinx¹ success in education. As the nation’s largest and youngest racial/ethnic minority group (Zong, 2022), Latinxs account for an increasingly larger proportion of the nation’s student population. Between 1996 and 2016, the number of Latinx students enrolled at every level of education doubled from 8.8 million to 17.9 million (America Counts Staff, 2017). Today, Latinxs make up 28% of all K-12 enrollments, and they are predicted to make up 30% by the end of the decade (UnidosUS, 2022). In states like California and Texas that have a high concentration of Latinxs, Latinx students account for about half of all public school enrollments (Lopez et al., 2018). Within higher education, Latinxs have been one of the fastest growing groups on college campuses (Excelencia in Education, 2019), though their enrollment did decline for the first time in a decade due to the COVID-19 pandemic (UnidosUS, 2022).

¹ Latinx is a gender-inclusive, pan-ethnic term that refers to people from all genders living in the United States of Latin American origin or descent (Scharrón-del Río & Aja, 2020). It is used to acknowledge gender diversity and increase the visibility of gender-expansive people (Scharrón-del Río & Aja, 2020). When referring to a specific gender identity in this study, Latina is used for women, and Latino is used for men. When direct quotes are used, the original term used by the speaker is preserved.

How Latinx students fare, particularly in terms of educational attainment, has significant implications for the social and economic development of these students. In addition to increasing employment opportunities, having a college degree significantly improves one's earnings potential (Greenstone et al., 2013). Those with a bachelor's degree are estimated to make 74% more over a lifetime than those with only a high school diploma (Carnevale et al., 2013). This equates to about a \$1 million difference in lifetime earnings (Carnevale et al., 2013). For individuals coming from low-income households, which Latinx students are more likely to be (Edwards, 2019), having a college degree presents a real opportunity for social mobility (Greenstone et al., 2013). It also has significant positive effects on personal well-being as those with bachelor's degrees are more likely to have health insurance, live longer, be married, and report high levels of happiness (Trostel, 2015).

Latinx educational attainment also means securing a strong, globally competitive economy for the country. It is projected that by 2027, 70% jobs will require a level of education and training higher than high school (Blumenstyk, 2020). At the same time, the U.S. is also facing a shortage of over 9 million workers with postsecondary degrees (Holtz-Eakin & Lee, 2019), and it is likely that this shortage has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as overall college enrollment has declined as a result (Welding, 2023). Thus, Latinxs, who will continue to drive labor force growth and represent nearly one-third of American workers in the future (Colby & Ortman, 2015), will be essential to filling this shortage gap and strengthening the economy (Coulombe & Gil, 2016). Having a highly educated and productive Latinx population is likely to confer other economic and social benefits as well, including additional tax revenue and higher rates of volunteerism, voting, and civic engagement (Trostel, 2015). Increased educational attainment rates are also

associated with lower levels of poverty, crime, and dependence on public assistance (Trostel, 2015). Thus, Latinx educational attainment is also a matter of social justice as it can help combat the widening income inequality gap in the U.S. (Próspero et al., 2012).

For these reasons, it is a national imperative that we invest in Latinx student success, particularly their college attendance and completion rates (Camacho Liu, 2011; Coulombe & Gil, 2016; New America Alliance Institute, 2014). The persistence of low educational attainment levels among Latinxs makes the task especially urgent. As such, there have been various efforts through research and policy to better understand the challenges facing Latinx students as well as to improve their education and opportunities for advancement. The most substantial policy effort in the last 15 years was President Barack Obama's Executive Order to establish the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (Office of the Press Secretary, 2010). These efforts along with other factors (e.g., high valuing of higher education among Latinxs), have contributed to the progress made by Latinx students in educational attainment over the past three decades (UnidosUS, 2022). Between 2010 and 2020, the Latinx high school dropout rate fell from 15.1% to 7.4% while the Latinx college enrollment rate continued to increase (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022b, 2022d). As a result, the proportion of college students who were Latinx increased from 10% to 20% between 2000 and 2020, making Latinxs the largest racial/ethnic minority group enrolled at postsecondary institutions (Mora, 2022). Degree attainment rates among Latinxs have also improved. In 2021, 34% of Latinxs 25 to 29 years old had at least an associate degree compared to 21% in 2010 (Postsecondary National Policy Institute [PNPI], 2022). The number of Latinxs who had a bachelor's degree or higher also increased (13% to 23%) during this period (PNPI, 2022).

Although the preceding figures substantiate the positive and notable strides made by Latinx students, they also obscure the fact that Latinx students continue to underperform when compared to white, Black, and Asian student groups (Gramlich, 2017). First, the high school dropout rate remains highest among Latinx students (NCES, 2022d). Of those who do graduate high school and go on to pursue postsecondary education, almost half of them are enrolled in two-year or community colleges (Anthony et al., 2021). Latinxs students are overrepresented in these institutions as 28% of students enrolled at two-year colleges are Latinx despite Latinx students only being 20% of the entire student population (PNPI, 2022). Latinx students are also less likely than white students to enroll full-time or attend a four-year university (Mora, 2022). Educational attainment rates among Latinxs continue to lag behind other student groups as well. Although more Latinxs have earned postsecondary degrees since 2000, they have not seen any gains in closing the bachelor's degree attainment gap (23 percentage points) between themselves and their white counterparts (NCES, 2022c). In terms of master's or higher degree attainment, the Latinx-white gap actually grew 3 percentage points between 2000 and 2019 (NCES, 2022c).

As previously noted, research efforts focused on Latinx educational attainment has expanded. A significant portion of this scholarship has identified individual and environmental factors associated with Latinx underachievement. Examples of such factors found in the literature include: residing in a single-parent household (Barton & Coley, 2007), working to help support one's family or other familial obligations (Flook & Fuligni, 2008; Sy, 2006), being a first-generation student (Zalaquett, 2006), lacking positive role models or mentors (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006), having parents with low levels of education (Sánchez et al., 2006), exposure to violence (Solberg et al., 2007), experiencing prejudice

and/or discrimination (Berkel et al., 2010), being undocumented (Abrego & Gonzalez, 2010; Contreras, 2009; Sahay et al., 2016), limited English proficiency (DeCarlo Santiago et al., 2014; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010), acculturative stress (Corona et al., 2017; DeCarlo Santiago et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2007), and having a mental health disorder (Zychinski & Polo, 2011). Culturalist explanations have also been used to explain poor educational outcomes and low levels of participation by Latinx parents in schools (Medina et al., 2015; Valencia & Black, 2002).

The information gained from this type of deficit-based research, though informative when appropriately contextualized, is insufficient to comprehend or resolve the current “crisis” of educational attainment among Latinx people (Luna & Revilla, 2013). Understanding what places some students at risk can be useful when developing interventions and policies to mitigate the disadvantages and obstacles that these students experience. However, Latinx students may be better served if researchers can determine what helps them overcome and flourish (i.e., enabling factors) rather than what causes them to flounder (Martin & Marsh, 2009). Additionally, examining those students that have faced adversity and have still been academically successful may have more utility (Alva, 1991; Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Morales, 2008a) as the Latinx student experience is generally one characterized by disadvantage (Schneider et al., 2006). Adversities commonly experienced by Latinx students include poverty, discrimination, lower levels of parental education, and immigration-related issues. In advocating for the further study of academically successful Latinx students, Morales (2008a) explains that “by exploring those who have been successful, a deeper understanding of achievement processes can be attained” (p. 245). Unfortunately, not enough attention has been given to the enabling factors that facilitate

educational achievement or to high achieving Latinx students, despite gains made by Latinxs in education. Significant effort to move beyond deficit-based research must be made if more effective solutions are to be found.

One construct that can help researchers understand and promote Latinx student achievement is academic resilience. Academic resilience is a relatively young area of study within psychology and education that aims to understand how students academically succeed in spite of adversity. Definitions of academic resilience differ to varying degrees across the literature, but generally, academic resilience is thought of as “a capacity to overcome acute and/or chronic adversity that is seen as a major threat to a student’s educational development” (Martin, 2013, p. 488). Although it is common for academic resilience to be framed as a personal attribute (i.e., individual ability) or outcome (i.e., high academic achievement or performance), there is also agreement that academic resilience is a dynamic process that is shaped by various internal and external factors (Das, 2019; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Morales, 2008b, Perez et al., 2009). In the current study, academic resilience refers to the capacity, outcome, and process of overcoming adversity within an educational context (Cassidy, 2016). In taking this position, this study assumes that academic resilience can be cultivated and enhanced (Martin & Marsh, 2009), thereby opening new avenues to promote educational attainment among Latinx students. As an example, initiatives like *Bridges to High School Program/Projecto Puentes a la Secundaria*, a prevention program aimed at increasing Latinx college enrollment, have been found to increase participant’s engagement in school (Gonzales et al., 2012; Gonzales et al., 2014), which is a critical element of academic resilience (Finn & Rock, 1997).

Research on academic resilience, though expanding, has been largely one dimensional and centered around the single identity domain of ethnicity. When studies have accounted for multiple identities, an additive framework has been used to explain students' experiences (Parent et al., 2013; Sarno et al., 2015). Such an approach treats social identities as existing independently of one another, and in doing so, fails to capture how various social identities can be simultaneous, inseparable, and intertwined (Crenshaw, 1991). This is particularly problematic in light of growing evidence of the impact of intersectionality processes on educational outcomes for Latinxs (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016; Nuñez, 2014; Ovink, 2014).

Within higher education research, Nuñez (2014) has called attention to the advantages of using a lens of intersectionality to understand Latinx students' experiences. Intersectionality, a concept and approach advanced by feminist scholarship, "posits that multiple social categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) intersect at the micro-level of individual experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression at the macro, social-structural level (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism)" (Bowleg, 2012, p. 1267). An intersectional perspective allows researchers to examine the relationships, patterns, and processes among different social identities and social structures. In the context of research on Latinx students, it has been argued that, by focusing on social context and how variations in social identities shape students' experiences, an intersectional perspective can lead to a more holistic and accurate understanding of the current state of educational attainment for Latinxs (Glance et al., 2021; Nuñez, 2014).

The integration of an intersectional perspective into studies of academic resilience presents an opportunity to advance previous work in this area. Currently, it is unclear how different social identities interact in Latinxs' experiences of academic resilience, as much of the literature has exclusively focused on the impact of ethnic identity. While some studies on Latinx students have also considered variables like gender, national origin, and socioeconomic status, very few have examined the intersections of these identities and their influence on Latinxs overcoming and succeeding in school. Undoubtedly, all social identities and their intersections play into Latinx students' experiences of academic resilience. Given the absence of research that uses an intersectional perspective to explore academic resilience, it may be prudent to begin this line of inquiry by focusing on one intersection.

The intersection of ethnicity and gender is likely a good starting point for several reasons. First, there is a strong body of literature on Latinx educational outcomes that includes both gender and ethnicity as variables. Second, there is a growing gender gap in education with women outpacing men in college enrollment and completion (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; Parker, 2021). Although the gender gap is found across all racial and ethnic groups, it is most pronounced among Latinas and Latinos (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). For example, in 2020, 41% of Latinas were enrolled in college compared to 30% of Latinos (PNPI, 2022). Additionally, about 60% of bachelor's degrees conferred to Latinxs in 2009 were earned by Latina females (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011). This disparity in degree attainment continues to persist today, and it is projected to continue to grow (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011). Alarmed by the widening gender gap among Latinas and Latinos, Sánchez et al. (2005) argued that "the examination of gender should become central in research" as it may help to

clarify how and why this gender gap is occurring as well as point to possible solutions (p. 627). Finally, gender is a primary category system used for social categorization (Ridgeway, 2011). While race, rather than ethnicity, is a primary category system in the U.S. (Fiske, 1998), ethnicity may be more relevant in the study of Latinxs. For Latinxs in the U.S., racial and ethnic identities are complex and multidimensional (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2016). Racial and ethnic labels, as defined by the federal government, are organized such that people who identify as Latinx can be of any race. This distinction, however, can be at times confusing or unwanted as the majority of Latinxs feel that they do not fit in to any of the racial categories provided by the government (Cohn, 2017). Studies looking into Latinx racial identity having found that the majority of Latinxs (67%) view being Latinx as part of their racial background (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2015). Moreover, Latinxs are more likely to describe their identity by using their family's country of origin (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican; Taylor et al., 2012).

Notwithstanding the intertwined nature of race and ethnicity for many Latinxs, the author treats them as two distinct identities and points of intersection and chose to focus on ethnicity in this current study. The author asserts that race and ethnicity, though social constructions, are real in that people use them in the construction of their sense of self. They also exert real influence and have meaningful consequences for people's everyday lives. Furthermore, there is a good portion of Latinxs who identify with a racial group that is different from their ethnic identity. In fact, about 25% of Latinx people do not see being Latinx as part of their racial background (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2015). Conflating race and ethnicity also ignores racial dynamics and colorism that occur within Latinx groups. There have been calls for greater recognition of the impact of skin color and physiognomy

on Latinxs' opportunities, employment, mental health, and interpersonal relationships (Adames et al., 2016).

Rationale for the Study

Latinxs and their educational success will be critical to the social and economic progress of the U.S. Although they face numerous barriers and obstacles in their pursuit of educational attainment, Latinxs have made significant progress in spite of this, which is evidence of their academic resilience. Unfortunately, little is known about how academic resilience is experienced among these students as successful Latinxs are understudied. Moreover, studies on academic resilience among Latinxs have not given much attention to the influence of social context and identity despite evidence that gender and ethnic identity impact resilience processes (Alfaro et al., 2009; Belgrave et al., 2000; Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2006; Morales, 2008b) To build our knowledge base in this area, the current qualitative study examined the relationship between academic resilience, ethnicity, and gender for Latinas. The researcher elected to focus on the experiences of Latinas as they exhibit high levels of academic resilience evidenced by increased educational attainment among this group. Attending to one gender also allowed for more in-depth analysis. Using a critical realist perspective and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the intersection of ethnicity and gender was explored and analyzed through Latina college students' stories collected through interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In identifying patterns of meaning across participant interviews, a new, multidimensional and multifaceted understanding of academic resilience that can inform research, clinical practice, and educational policy is rendered.

The specialty of Counseling Psychology aims to foster positive growth in people's personal and interpersonal lives using research that attends to environmental influences, multicultural context, and diverse identities. Studying academic resilience is one example of how counseling psychologists can promote this growth. This burgeoning area of study is still limited, and this study will help to expand the existing literature on Latinas' experiences of educational success despite adversity. It will also support efforts to help build on the gains that Latina students have made in education. Finally, the inclusion of an intersectional approach is congruent with and will further the field's goals of advancing social justice. By looking at intersections of multiple identities, our understanding of Latina students' experiences will be more dynamic, critical, and socially relevant.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore Latina college students' experiences of academic resilience at the intersection of ethnicity and gender. More specifically, thematic analysis informed by a critical realist perspective was employed to examine how participants perceive their experiences of academic resilience in terms of their gender and ethnic identities. Such information will add to an emerging body of academic resilience research as well as advance a strengths-based and intersectional approach to the study of Latinx education. Findings from this study may also advance our understanding of the educational gender gap as well as inform clinical interventions and educational policy targeted at promoting Latinx resilience and academic achievement.

Research Question

The following research question guided the current study:

1. Among Latina college students who have overcome adversity to succeed in school, how have their experiences of academic resilience been shaped by their gender and ethnic identities?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Academic Resilience

Academic resilience is both pertinent and vital to promoting Latinx student success. The construct first came into the literature in a study by Sylvia Alva (1991). In this study, which looked at protective factors in the academic success of Mexican American high school students, Alva (1991) called what we now know as academic resilience, *academic invulnerability*. For Alva (1991), academically invulnerable (or resilient) students were those “who sustain high levels of achievement motivation and performance despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly in school and ultimately dropping out of school” (p. 19). She found that what differentiated invulnerable students from vulnerable ones were environmental resources and subjective appraisals. In her study, academically invulnerable students reported significantly higher levels of both teacher and peer support compared to their vulnerable peers. They were also more likely to participate and enjoy school activities, feel encouraged and prepared to go to college, and have less peer and family conflict.

Since this initial study, academic resilience as a construct has evolved and is more widely recognized. For the most part, definitions of academic resilience resemble Alva’s definition of academic invulnerability. However, Alva’s definition in terms of the risks and adaptation or gains has been broadened. For example, Wang et al. (1994), like Alva (1991), view academic resilience as academic *success*, but include persistence in their interpretation and expand the risks to include stressful events and environments. Sosa and Gomez (2012) take a more general and inclusive approach and define academic resilience as the ability to cope with adversity, though not necessarily specific to education, and still be academically

engaged. Finally, similar to the concept of psychological resilience, Wayman (2002) characterizes academic resilience as the individual's ability to *overcome* educational risk and *adapt* to context of their education.

Although there is no single agreed upon definition of academic resilience, there are features of the conceptualization that run throughout the literature. For example, in all definitions, a student is only considered resilient if they are at risk for negative educational outcomes (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Additionally, academic resilience is generally perceived as dynamic rather than static (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Finally, research on academic resilience has primarily aimed to identify protective factors and processes that prevent or buffer the impact of various risk factors.

Academic Resilience in Latinx Students

In general, researchers studying academic resilience have used academic achievement and attainment, motivation factors, and other psychosocial processes to classify students as resilient or not. Alva (1991) differentiated resilient from non-resilient Latinx students on the basis of GPA. Results from her study demonstrated that Mexican American students with a high GPA (i.e., academically resilient) were more likely to feel prepared to attend college, enjoy school, participate in school activities, and experience fewer conflicts with peers and family members.

Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) used student's self-reported grades as the discriminating criteria for resilience and reported complementary findings to Alva's (1991) study. Resilient students in their study reported significantly higher GPAs. The authors also found that sense of belongingness, which consisted of positive attitude toward school and teachers, value placed on school, and peer belonging, predicted resilience (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997).

Interestingly, cultural pride and awareness did not predict resilience, but did predict GPA. Moreover, there were significant differences between resilient and non-resilient students in terms of family and peer support and endorsement of cultural familism, with resilient students scoring higher. Waxman et al. (1997) also opted to differentiate resilient students and non-resilient students using academic outcomes (e.g., self-reported grades, GPA), but instead used students' grades in math as well as preset percentiles of a standardized problem-solving test. Their findings indicated that resilient Latinx students held high academic aspirations and were much more motivated, satisfied, and involved in school than non-resilient students.

Finally, Perez et al. (2009) delineated resilience by levels of risk and protective factors. In other words, the academically resilient group was characterized by high levels of psychosocial risk accompanied by high levels of personal and environmental protective factors. The high-risk category was characterized by high levels of psychosocial risk accompanied by low levels of personal and environmental protective factors. Compared to high-risk students, academically resilient students in this study had significantly higher GPAs, number of academic awards, and number of honors and AP courses (Perez et al., 2009). Academically resilient students also had significantly higher parental valuing of school, extracurricular participation, and volunteerism compared to high-risk students (Perez et al., 2009). It is important to note that in this study there was no significant difference in the distribution of cluster membership by gender. In fact, none of the studies described above observed any significant gender-related differences.

Gender, Ethnicity, and Academic Resilience

Risk Factors

A prerequisite for academic resilience is the presence of risk. Latina and Latino students are exposed to similar risks and barriers that impact their ability to succeed in school. Much of what we find among both Latina and Latino students in terms of negative educational outcomes can be attributed to the barriers and stressors (i.e. risk factors) they experience as a result of their marginalized status in the U.S. (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Valencia & Black, 2002). Examples of these risk factors include English language difficulties, low socioeconomic status, acculturation, and documentation status (Becerra, 2010; Cavazos et al., 2010; Graff et al., 2013; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). One important barrier experienced by both genders is the lack of knowledge about higher education systems and culture. Approximately half of all Latinx college students have parents who have a high school education or less (Santiago, 2011). As such, many Latinx parents are unable to provide the instrumental knowledge needed to help navigate their sons and daughters through institutions of higher education (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). These first-generation students are left vulnerable as they adjust to college culture and campus life on their own.

The financial obligation involved in attaining a college degree is another pervasive barrier experienced by Latinx students. Four out of ten Latinx students attribute their inability to pay for college as a reason for not continuing their education (Lopez, 2009). Of those Latinx students who enter the workforce or military after graduating high school, 66% of them report that they did not enroll in college because they needed to support their families (Krogstad, 2016). Although many Latinx students are able to find the initial funds to enroll in college, continuing to pay for college often proves to be difficult. Approximately 80% of Latinx undergraduates apply for financial aid (Santiago & Cunningham, 2005). High

tuitions and fees also force many Latinx college students to work while in school (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Compared to their peers, Latinx college students work at higher rates and for longer hours, the average being 30 hours or more per week (Malcolm et al., 2010). The stress these students experience trying to make enough money to support themselves, and in many cases their families, ultimately affects their grades. Crisp and Nora (2010) found that higher number of hours worked negatively impacted Latinx student success.

Although all of these barriers play a role in the underachievement trends of Latinx students, discrimination and alienation at school may be the most prominent stressor for Latinx students today (Cavazos et al., 2010; Greene et al., 2006; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Compared to their non-Latinx peers, Latinx students are more likely to experience discrimination, feel unwelcomed at school, and have limited access to school resources (Martinez et al., 2004). Nearly half of Latinx young adults report experiences of discrimination (Pérez et al., 2008). Such findings are troubling as Latinxs who experience discrimination are at greater risk for decreased mental health (Potochnick et al., 2012; Zeiders et al., 2013) and self-esteem (Edwards & Romero, 2008) as well as for poor educational outcomes (Benner & Graham, 2011).

While Latinx students are exposed to many of the same structural and systemic barriers, they experience and manifest the effects of these barriers differently (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). The Latinx gender gap in education is an example of how gender and ethnicity may interact to produce different experiences and outcomes. This gender gap refers to the difference in educational attainment between men and women. Within the U.S., women of all ethnic and racial groups outperform their male counterparts in college enrollment and attainment (Ryan & Baumen, 2016). Labeled the “feminization” of higher education

(DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013, p.1), the gender gap is most dire among Latina and Latino students. Sáenz and Ponjuan (2011) reported a 10-point difference in high school completion rates between Latinas (73%) and Latinos (63%). This gap in graduation rates ultimately influences rates of college enrollment and degree completion. Specifically, Sáenz and Ponjuan (2011) found that for every five Latinxs that enroll in college, three are women and two are men. Within Latinx ethnic groups, the gender gap is largest among Mexican Americans as there are twice as many Mexican American women who are first-year college students as there are Mexican American men (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). In total, 62% of all college degrees earned by Latinxs are women (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011).

The causes of gender disparity in educational attainment are complex and not well understood, but it is clear that the current educational system and other socio-cultural factors are working against Latino students and their ability to succeed (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). For example, while Latinx students as a whole are more likely to be overrepresented in special education (Parrish, 2002), this overrepresentation is more evident among Latino students (Losen & Orfield, 2002). Alfaro et al. (2009) also found that discrimination was associated with lower academic motivation and grade point average among Latino teens. In explaining this association, the authors suggested that teachers' low expectations of these Latino teens lead to ineffective teaching behaviors, which elicit Latino students' poor academic performance and motivation. When trying to confront these negative stereotypes by doing well in school, Latino students face another predicament. They face the threat of being perceived by their peers as "acting white" (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009, p. 60). The peer pressure and cultural stigma that Latinos experience in being academically successful is not felt as strongly by their female counterparts (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Flores-Gonzalez

(2005) has also noted that students who identify with minority culture either through their deportment, clothing, speech, or friend group are seen as “troublemakers” by teachers and administrators, and therefore, are provided fewer opportunities to advance in school (p.628). This dynamic is perhaps another reason why Latino students are at an increased risk for negative educational outcomes (Ceballo et al., 2010).

In addition to these obstacles, young Latinos, compared to Latinas, are also more likely to have full-time jobs, serve in the military, and be imprisoned, all of which negatively impact their ability to be in school (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). Their declining presence in higher education is also impacted by the lack of political attention to the specific challenges that Latino students face (Noguera et al., 2012). Policies like Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Title IX of the Equal Opportunity in Education Act benefit Latinas by advancing the educational opportunities of female students. The success of these policies for women distracts both politicians and researchers from the failing state of male students of color (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

Nevertheless, Latinas face their own unique challenges in pursuing higher education. Traditional Latinx gender roles dictate that women devote themselves to nurturing and caring for the family, even at the expense of their own needs and desires (Senour, 1977). These cultural expectations of women can place them in a “cultural bind” when pursuing higher education (Reese & Gallimore, 2000). Balancing their responsibilities to the family and school obligations, which are often competing, can make it difficult for Latinas to succeed in college (Sy & Romero, 2008). The pressure to fulfill both roles is fueled by their desire to help their families and honor their parents’ sacrifices (Graff et al., 2013). This can be further complicated by parents’ lack of understanding of how education can improve the

family's socioeconomic status (Graff et al., 2013). Although there is research that shows parental support for Latinas' pursuit of higher education, the support can come with certain stipulations like attending a college close to home (Gómez Cervantes, 2011).

Protective Factors

The literature on academic resilience, in general, organizes protective factors into two categories: personal and parental resources. Research on Latinx students provides evidence of gender differences in terms of these factors.

Personal Factors. Latina and Latino students differ in self-perception, motivation, and attitudes toward education. Latina students compared to Latino students have a strong sense of identity and efficacy (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Cerezo & Chang, 2013), which is associated with academic resilience. Additionally, some research shows that both Latina and Latino students view Latinas as “more focused” on educational attainment than Latinos (Ovink, 2004). They also have less confidence in Latinos' ability to do well in college (Ovink, 2014). Ovink (2014) suggests that Latina students' focus is the reason many of them forego romantic relationships while in college. She explains that Latinas may perceive dating as jeopardizing their educational and career goals. Latino students, on the other hand, generally benefit from having a female partner because these partners help keep Latinos accountable for their schoolwork. Ovink's assertion is supported by results of studies that show that greater independence among Latinos leads to lower aspirations and attainment (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Smith, 2002).

There is also research that documents that Latina students have higher levels of school valuing and engagement than their male peers (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Niehaus et al., 2016; Perez et al., 2009). Specifically, Perez and colleagues (2009) found that among

undocumented Latinx high school, community college, and university students across the U.S., Latina students demonstrated significantly higher valuing of school than Latinos. Moreover, this valuing of school was positively associated with GPA and number of school awards, both of which are found to be related to academic resilience among Latinx students (Alva, 1991, Gonzalez, & Padilla, 1997; Perez et al., 2009). Causes for this gender difference in school valuing are unclear, but it appears that many Latino students come to devalue academic achievement as they get older (Graham et al., 1998; Taylor & Graham, 2007). Taylor and Graham (2007) found that, compared to Latino elementary school students, Latino middle school students demonstrated a stronger preference for low-achieving peers. Such findings are important because school valuing along with school connectedness are associated with greater engagement, resulting in higher rates of high school completion and college attendance among Latinx students (Niehaus et al., 2016).

Researchers have suggested that differences in the meaning of education between Latinas and Latinos play an important role in the gender achievement gap, and therefore could influence academic resilience. Specifically, it is argued that Latinas identify higher education as the path to gaining equality, status, and independence as well as reducing the likelihood of entering traditional and patriarchal partnerships (Cammara, 2004; Ovink, 2014). This argument is supported by findings that show that Latinas' academic resilience is strengthened by their desire to challenge traditional gender roles (Graff et al., 2013). Within traditional Latinx families, Latina daughters often must earn their independence, and a college degree is thought to be the most effective way to realize that goal. Interestingly, it appears that Latinas are in fact becoming even more independent than their Latino peers.

While the percentage of Latinos who return home after college has grown to 21%, Latinas are moving back home at a rate of only 11% (Carrasquillo, 2012).

Still, Latinos possess a great degree of autonomy in their family homes. This is because traditional Latinx gender norms and family structures grant sons greater latitude compared to daughters (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). As such, Latino sons do not feel the pressure or need to secure a college education in the same way Latinas do (Ovink, 2014). Latinos also do not have to rely on higher education to be financially successful. Latinos often have access to jobs that, although physically demanding, provide a good income without a college degree (e.g., construction). Thus, for Latinos who have alternatives in terms of decently paid employment, a college education serves as the path to securing white-collar work (Ovink, 2014). This is not to suggest that Latinos are not motivated to pursue higher education; rather, gender may influence how Latinas and Latinos interpret the meaning and value of college (Ovink, 2014).

Parental Factors. The greatest gender differences implicated in the academic resilience of Latinx students involve environmental factors such as parents. Specifically, parents' perceptions of their sons and daughters influence educational outcomes. Although seemingly contradictory to traditional Latinx gender norms, parents often view educating their daughters as an "investment" (Ovink, 2014, p. 274). Both Latina and Latino students believe that attaining a college education will help them support their families. However, they differ in their views about which family (i.e., family of origin versus future family) they see benefiting from their degree (Ovink, 2014). Compared to Latinos, Latina students experience greater and more constant pressure to financially support their family of origin. They are also more likely to provide direct assistance to their families while in school than

Latino students (Ovink, 2014). Latinos, on the other hand, view their college degree as helping them take care of their future wives and children (Ovink, 2014). When young Latinos do provide financial help to their family of origin, they often defer or give up their educational aspirations (Ovink, 2014). Given these familial dynamics, Latinx parents may come to believe that investing in their daughter's education will yield greater returns than their son's education.

Perception differences also manifest in differences in parental encouragement between Latina and Latino students. Research finds that Latina daughters are more encouraged than Latino sons to pursue education, and that this encouragement primarily comes from Latina mothers (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). It appears that this disparity in maternal encouragement will persist and grow as more and more Latinas become both college graduates and mothers. In fact, the rate of Latina mothers with college degrees has more than tripled over the past 40 years (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). These mothers, because of their own experiences, understand the significance and implications of a college education for their daughters, and as such direct more encouragement towards their daughters.

Chapter 3: Method

Research Design

Latinas' experiences of academic resilience have yet to be fully explored. Although knowledge in this area is emerging, little is known about the ways in which Latinas' intersecting identities relate to their experiences of hardship and academic success. Due to the exploratory nature of the research question, this study utilized qualitative inquiry, and specifically, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine how the gender and ethnic identities of Latina college students shaped their experiences of academic resilience.

A key advantage of a qualitative approach is that it allows for the production of new knowledge and understanding of complex realities and phenomena that may otherwise be reduced to aggregated data points when using quantitative approaches (Patton, 2002; Schulz, 2011). It does so by “ground[ing] research in the lived experiences of those whose lives we investigate” (Morrow et al., 2001, p. 575), and by privileging social context and individual perception and meaning (Coyle, 2016; Kvale, 1996). Such characteristics make qualitative approaches well suited for examining intersections of social identity, which the research question of this study required. Parent et al. (2013) note that intersectionality research has largely favored qualitative methodologies as they lead to a more complete and authentic understanding of how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences in relation to their intersecting identities. While quantitative approaches can be used to identify relationships between categories of identity and disparate outcomes (e.g., Latina/o gender gap in education), qualitative methods are better able to capture the complex dynamics involved in illuminating processes and contextual factors that are invisible, unknown, or overlooked (Nuñez, 2014; Parent et al., 2013).

A qualitative design was also utilized in the current study because of its ability to facilitate voice for groups of people who have been suppressed by various systems of oppression (Coyle, 2016). Despite increasing interest in the experiences of Latinas, their voices often remain muted or excluded in the literature. The absence of their voices in quantitative research designs both limits our understanding of Latinas' experiences and reenacts the silencing that Latinas encounter in society at large. It also permits misperceptions of Latinas to go unchallenged, which can serve to perpetuate their subjugation as well as other social inequities. A qualitative approach, on the other hand, provides an opportunity for the complexities of experience among Latinas to be shared in a more holistic way (Nuñez, 2014).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis is a widely used approach for analyzing qualitative data in psychological research. It emphasizes context and rich description and focuses on identifying and interpreting patterns or themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The author selected this specific method of analysis because it best complemented the exploratory and inductive nature of this study. It also has been frequently used in research focused on people's lived experiences, perceptions, and practices (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Additionally, Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach is useful for answering questions targeting processes and dynamic factors (e.g., social identities) that underlie specific lived experiences like academic resilience. Another advantage of this approach is its accessibility. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a six-phase, systematic and comprehensive model for conducting thematic analysis. This model not only makes thematic analysis accessible for researchers with limited qualitative research experience, but it also ensures that the method is actively and rigorously applied to the data by the researcher. In addition,

the manner in which results are presented make the information accessible to persons outside academia (Braun & Clarke, 2014). This point was particularly important to the author and her goal of using study findings to inform both practice and policy (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Philosophical Framework

Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that their approach to thematic analysis is unique compared to other approaches because it is a method or technique for analyzing qualitative data rather than a methodology (e.g., grounded theory, case study, ethnography) that is based in a particular theoretical or philosophical framework (Clarke & Braun, 2016). This, they argue, allows their approach to be used flexibly and applied across epistemological and ontological positions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the same time, Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that the theoretical flexibility of their approach necessitates that researchers explicitly identify and describe the philosophical underpinnings of their research.

The current study was informed by critical realism, which joins ontological realism with epistemological constructivism (Mingers, 2006). Haigh et al. (2019) explain:

According to [critical realism], there is a reality that exists independent of our thoughts about it, and while observing may make us more confident about what exists, existence itself is not dependent on observation (Sayer, 2000). An example of this is that people have the right to health even when they are not aware of it. While we can acquire or construct knowledge about reality, that knowledge can be fallible, or mistaken. (p. 3)

Simply put, critical realism suggests that an independent reality exists, but our knowledge of it is socially constructed. Thus, critical realism acknowledges that the “real world” is

understood through people's own social position and process of perception. It views different perspectives on reality as equally valid in that they are all "partial, incomplete and fallible" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 5). However, critical realism rejects the notion of "multiple realities" that can be judged, measured, or considered comparatively (Maxwell, 2012). That is, there is one reality, but there can be different yet valid interpretations of it. Or as Sayer (2000) simply puts, "the world should not be conflated with our experience of it" (p. 11).

Critical realism has been increasingly used as a philosophical framework in fields like sociology, public health, and economics, but continues to be met with skepticism within psychology (Mingers, 2006). Critical realism also has not been as widely adopted in qualitative research as other frameworks (e.g., social constructivist), which Fletcher (2017) has attributed to a lack of guidance in the literature on the application of critical realism in research. Despite these concerns, critical realism provides a useful framework for the current study. First, critical realism is well suited for questions that are best addressed using qualitative methodology because it focuses on exploring and explaining complex social phenomena rather than merely describing or predicting it (Allana & Clark, 2018). Critical realism also gives prominence to the power and influence of social structures, like ethnicity and gender, on human behavior and phenomena like academic resilience (Allana & Clark, 2018). Maxwell (2011) explains, "A realist approach can highlight the importance of diversity and heterogeneity as a real phenomenon, rather than simply 'noise' that obscures general truths and can promote the exploration of the actual consequences of diversity" (p. 21). At the same time, critical realism also recognizes the importance of human agency and meaning. Under this framework, the meaning that a person makes out of their experience is viewed "as just as real as physical phenomena and are essential to the explanation of social

and cultural phenomena” (Maxwell, 2011, p. 19). Finally, it has been suggested that critical realism has the capacity to identify possible solutions to social problems because of its ability to reveal underlying causal systems, structures, and processes (Fletcher, 2017).

Bonnington and Rose (2014) note that Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to thematic analysis is congruous with critical realism “as it can be used to assess the ways participants give meaning to their experiences (i.e., different perspectives on reality), whilst acknowledging that such meaning is fallible” (p. 10). The theoretical freedom of Braun and Clarke’s approach also makes it suitable for research informed by critical realism. Critical realism does not espouse a single or particular method, and has been used with various approaches, including ethnography and grounded theory (Clark, 2008). Given that the methodological implications of critical realism have yet to be fully articulated and that Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach is theoretically independent, thematic analysis and critical realism can be readily integrated (Maxwell, 2012). Both place great emphasis on understanding the meaning that people give to their experiences as well as on providing rigorous description and conceptually informed interpretations of the data that are convincing and make sense to the reader (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Clark, 2008, Maxwell, 2012). Although Braun and Clarke (2006) argue against a realist ontology, the underlying epistemology of critical realism (constructivist and relativist) is consistent with their view that themes do not “emerge” but are developed through the interaction of the researcher with the data.

In terms of data analysis, one important advantage of critical realism is that it leaves different options open for conducting the data analysis. For the current project, the author elected to be the sole coder, which has been supported by Clarke and Braun (2016). They

note that while consensus coding and intercoder reliability are grounded in a realist ontology, they are practices that reflect a positivist epistemological position (see Boyatzis, 1998; Hruschka et al., 2004). Although it seems that a critical realist perspective would contradict Braun and Clarke's argument on consensus coding, it does not. Where Braun and Clarke (2021) and critical realism do diverge on this issue is the logic behind it. Braun and Clarke (2021) explain that there is no one way to code because there is not one accurate reality that can be captured. Multiple independent coders do not result in superior coding, but rather merely show that coders have been trained to code in similar ways. Critical realism, on the other, holds that there is a real world that exists independently of the observer, but there is no possibility for it to be correctly understood because human knowledge is socially embedded and therefore fallible (Haigh et al., 2019; Maxwell, 2012). Moreover, under a critical realist framework, it is understood that knowledge changes over time (Haigh et al., 2019). Thus, the theories and concepts that research produces can be expanded, adjusted, and corrected (Haigh et al., 2019). Lastly, it is worth noting that both Braun and Clarke (2006) and critical realists acknowledge that the researcher's position and views will influence the way in which the data is interpreted, but also caution against imposing them onto the data.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

My role as an instrument in the collection and interpretation of data (Patton, 2002) as well as my positionality as an insider-outsider (Yakushko et al., 2011) made reflexivity central to this research endeavor. Reflexivity refers to the continuous process of critical reflection by the researcher on the influence that they and participants exert on the research (Coyle, 2016). Included in this process is an awareness and acknowledgment of the

bidirectional relationship between the researcher and participants, and of the effect of the researcher's values, beliefs, and experiences on the interpretation of the data. Reflexivity and its inclusion in the reporting of findings allows the research process to be more open and transparent, which in turn helps to ensure the quality of the research (Coyle, 2016).

I am a heterosexual, cisgender, U.S. born Latina of Mexican descent. My relationship with the current research is a personal one. Initially, my interest in academic resilience as an area of study stemmed from my own experiences of persevering and overcoming adversity in high school and in college. In having "made it," I felt a deep sense of obligation to use my position of privilege to uplift others in my community. That is, I saw myself as academically resilient, and I wanted to help other Latinx students be academically resilient as well. As such, my motivation to pursue a doctoral degree and research was grounded in a desire to highlight the strength of those in my community and also to encourage other Latinx students that their dreams, whatever they may be, are possible.

Another aspect of my experience and identity that was salient to this research project was my family background. I was born and raised in Southern California. Both of my parents are immigrants from Mexico, are U.S. citizens, and are bilingual. My mother did not attend high school as the result of teenage pregnancy but earned her GED and pursued higher education during my early adolescence. My father had a bachelor's degree and master's degree and worked as a public school educator for nearly 40 years before his passing. Despite my father's level of education and career as a teacher, my mother has been the most supportive and influential figure in my educational journey. Early on in life, she filled my head with ideas that I could and would accomplish great things. She made my education a priority, always sacrificing time, energy, and money so that I could have what I

needed to succeed. Knowing that she never had the opportunity to go to high school and how that impacted her life fueled my academic ambition and pushed me to work through different challenges. My mother also played a significant role in shaping my identity as a Latina. By seeing my mother and other women in my family struggle and overcome hardships in their lives, I developed an image of a Latina who was independent, capable, determined, and courageous. I believe that having this positive Latina identity as well as having strong Latina figures in my life significantly contributed to my own perseverance and academic success.

In interviewing participants, I used these past experiences as points of departure to build rapport and engage during the interviews. This seemed particularly advantageous when discussing family dynamics, cultural values and Latina/o gender norms, and participants' past experiences of ethnic discrimination. My insider knowledge enabled me to approach these complex topics in a manner that elicited greater engagement, openness, and in-depth reflection from participants (Yakushko et al., 2011). It also enhanced my "theoretical sensitivity" to detect nuances in participants' stories, to determine what was relevant and what was not, and to focus the intersectional nature of their experiences while analyzing the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

During the interviews, the commonalities between my experiences and those of participants was notable to me. We faced similar challenges (e.g., ethnic discrimination by peers and professors, cultural adjustment difficulties), were motivated by similar factors to overcome (e.g., honoring parents' sacrifices, creating change for self and others), and had a high valuing of family. It was also evident that participants assumed a level of commonality and understanding between us. How this played out in the room varied from participant to

participant, but the two most common manifestations were participants interjecting Spanish words and phrases (e.g., “¡*Ponte las pilas!*”) into their responses and participants making remarks like “you know what I mean” and “you get it, right?” It was not surprising that participants deduced that I was Latina given my physical attributes, my last name, and my research topic. However, it did mean that I had to be more vigilant about not assenting to participants’ assumption of understanding and not imposing my experiences and preconceived ideas onto the data (Charmaz, 2006). To do this, I employed a range of reflexive strategies throughout the research process, including: identifying my social location, beliefs, and biases during the initial planning of the study; reviewing literature outside the field of psychology (e.g., education, Chicana Studies, sociology, public policy, etc.); asking probing and clarifying questions while avoiding leading questions during interviews (Chan et al., 2013); limiting coding sessions to 90 minutes to avoid fatigue; and tracking personal reactions and notes in a research diary (Stocker & Close, 2013).

Such strategies not only helped me separate my experiences from those of participants, but they also elevated my awareness of my position as an outsider. Through reflection on my relationship with participants, I became more cognizant of my social class privilege in relation to them. In the past, I have struggled to more deeply examine my social class identity because it engenders great feelings of personal guilt and discomfort. However, the salience of participants’ identities as first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds required that I give more reflexive attention to this privileged identity of mine. In doing so, I came to understand how my privileged position had shaped the research process. For example, in formulating my research topic and question, it unconsciously biased me to look at the role of gender (one of my marginalized identities) rather than social

class (one of my privileged identities) in academic resilience. I also was more alert to the power differences between myself and participants (Yakushko et al., 2011) and to other intersectional dynamics present in the data besides gender and ethnicity.

It must be noted that my own identity and social location changed over the course of the research process. Shortly after data collection, my sense of academic resilience was tested as I faced several personal challenges (i.e., mental illness, becoming a first-time mother, the death of my father, a difficult second pregnancy) amid difficult societal events and circumstances (i.e., racial injustice, sociopolitical unrest, the COVID-19 pandemic). Although working through these challenges gave me a unique understanding and appreciation for the current research topic, it also changed my lens as a researcher. That is, I, as the person who was now analyzing and interpreting the data, was in a different space and time from the person who conceptualized the study and collected the data. Specifically, I was now several years older and a mother to a little girl. In this way, my shifting position made me more of an outsider in relation to my participants. This necessitated that I rely more heavily on my past research notes to accurately contextualize my participants as I analyzed the data. It also may have made me more sensitive to certain topics that participants discussed such as the importance of family and the role of parents. Working with an external auditor, however, helped to ensure that I remain reflexive and grounded in the data.

Setting and Participants

Recruitment of participants occurred in the spring of 2018 at a large public, tier one research university on the coast of California. Although this university had a long history of being predominately white, the university was designated a Hispanic Serving Institution

(HSI) in 2015 with Latinx students accounting for 27% of the undergraduate student population (Brugger, 2015). Within the university, participants were recruited from undergraduate applied psychology courses. Interested students were instructed to contact the author via email to learn more about the study and to determine their eligibility. Upon contact, the author provided interested students with a screening form and instructed them to complete and return the form.

Participants were selected using criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling in which cases are selected using pre-selected criteria that are based on the study's research question (Patton, 2002). It was used in the current study due to its utility in gathering information-rich cases and facilitating in-depth exploration of a phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). Interested students were eligible if they met the following criteria: (a) were 18 years of age or older; (b) enrolled in the university as an undergraduate; (c) self-identified as Latina; (d) identified as having experienced one or more challenges or disadvantages that they believed put them at risk for underachievement or failure in school; and (e) felt that they had overcome that adversity and had been successful in school. Given that some adversities are chronic, students who believed that they were currently overcoming the identified adversity were still eligible to participate. Additionally, adversity was defined by the students themselves, which honors the uniqueness of each individual's experience as well as allows for greater consideration of social and cultural factors (Morgan & Zetzer, 2022).

Although the outcome-based approach has been overwhelmingly used in academic resilience research, Ricketts et al. (2017) argue that "a greater focus on the self-perceptions of academic resilience complements these findings by allowing us to understand student

perceptions of their risks and their ability to overcome such risks” (p. 80). Having specific outcome criteria that is externally placed on the student by the researcher, they note, not only limits what information can be obtained but also overlooks how students view their circumstances, strengths, and resources (Ricketts et al., 2017). Thus, allowing students to define adversity for themselves provided greater insight into their perceptions and understandings. Ricketts et al. (2017) also point out that opportunities to identify key points of prevention or early intervention are lost when classifying a student as academically resilient only after a specific outcome has occurred. In light of these arguments, the author used participant-defined parameters as evidence of academic resilience. Specifically, participants who believed that they had overcome or were overcoming an adversity and saw themselves as successful in school were understood as academically resilient for the purposes of this study. The use of this broad and self-defined criteria was not only consistent with the principles of strengths-based research, but it also provided an opportunity to explore the meaning of overcoming and success for Latinx students, which is not well understood.

For research utilizing a critical realist framework, Clark (2008) stresses the importance of saturation as well as sample sizes that are large enough to permit in-depth comparison. Braun and Clarke (2013) have put forth suggestions regarding sample size that are based on the type of data collection used and the size of the project. For example, they recommend 2–4 groups for focus groups and 10–100 for secondary sources. For research using interviews, Braun and Clarke (2013) recommend 10-20 participants for “medium” projects and 30 or more for “large” projects. Although Braun and Clarke (2013) do not specify the qualities that differentiate medium projects from large projects, the current study

would be classified as a medium project based on the examples of past student projects that they provided.

Participant Characteristics

Participants in this study were 15 self-identified Latina college students who reported having overcome adversity and been successful in school (see Appendix A). The majority of participants were born in the U.S. ($N = 12$) and reported being of Mexican descent ($N = 13$). All participants identified their gender and sex on the demographic questionnaire as female. Fourteen participants identified as heterosexual and one identified as bisexual. In terms of religious and spiritual affiliation, eight identified as Catholic, one identified as Christian, and six did not endorse any religious affiliation. Three participants identified as having a disability, with two reporting having a psychological disability and one not disclosing the specific type. Participants were not directly asked about documentation status, but two participants revealed during the interview that they were Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and that their parents were undocumented. One other participant also reported that her parents were undocumented. The annual family income of participants ranged from \$11,000 to \$55,000 ($M = 36,933$). The majority of participants were also on financial aid ($N = 13$) and employed ($N = 8$) at the time of the interview. All employed participants had on-campus jobs (e.g., admissions, facilities, dining services). All participants were upper division students and California residents. The majority of participants came from a city or community with a Latinx-majority population ($N = 10$). The majority were also first-generation college students ($N = 13$) and majoring in a social science field ($N = 12$). Specifically, seven participants were majoring in Sociology and five were majoring in Psychology. Additionally, 10 participants reported minoring in Applied

Psychology. Six participants were transfer students. One participant had transferred from a public four-year university and five had transferred from community colleges within California. All participants were within time-to-degree standards of the university and were on track to graduate in 2018 or 2019.

Instrumentation

Screening Form

A screening form to determine participant eligibility was administered in self-report format (see Appendix B). Five questions regarding the participant's ethnic and gender identities, school status, experience of adversity, and self-perception were included.

Demographic Questionnaire

A questionnaire which included items inquiring about participants' demographic and student characteristics was administered in self-report format (see Appendix C).

Demographic areas that were assessed included race, ethnicity, gender, sex, socioeconomic status, age, sexual orientation, religious faith or spiritual affiliation, ability status, first-generation status, and national origin. Student characteristics that were assessed included year in school, major, GPA, and current employment. Although undocumented students occupy a unique social position in the U.S. and face many educational barriers (Perez et al., 2009), questions regarding documentation status were intentionally excluded from the questionnaire to ensure participant safety and comfort given the anti-immigrant climate in the U.S. and the rescission of the DACA program (Duke, 2017).

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviewing was used to elicit information specific to the research question in the most efficient way possible. The interview protocol (see Appendix D) was

developed by the author with the input of her dissertation committee. Participants were asked a series of questions that related to different aspects of their overcoming adversity including the specific challenge or disadvantage, their response, facilitative factors, and motivations. Questions regarding participants' personal definitions of success and overcoming were also asked. Each question was followed by prompts to keep the interview focused as well as to encourage participants to go into more depth in their answers. Interview prompts also served to elicit reflection about the influence of ethnic and gender identities. At the end of the interview, participants were given an opportunity to share information about their experiences that was not specifically asked about but was important to understanding their experiences. This enabled the author to collect data that otherwise would have been missed.

Procedure

Interviews took place in-person during the spring of 2018. Participants were individually interviewed by the author in a research team office on campus. They received a \$45 Amazon gift card for their time and participation. Informed consent paperwork was reviewed, and written consent was obtained before interviews were conducted. Participants also completed the demographic questionnaire prior to the interview. The author briefly examined the questionnaire to identify potential areas to probe during the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission. After each interview, the author wrote down reflections about the participant and the overall interview to provide contextual information that aided in the analysis of the data (Birks et al., 2008). Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The median length of interviews was 54 minutes. All data was kept confidential, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym by the author.

Data Analysis

Process of Analysis

Analysis proceeded along the six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). To familiarize herself with the data (phase 1), the author read through the entire data set of transcripts before commencing coding. While reading each transcript, the author also listened to the audio recording to capture the tone and pace of the interview. This was particularly important as the range of emotionality among the participants greatly varied. Any patterns observed or initial ideas generated from these readings were documented in notes that were used in subsequent stages of analysis. Interview transcripts were then uploaded into NVivo for Mac qualitative analysis software to facilitate coding (phase 2). The author used inductive and open coding. All interesting aspects in the data were initially coded at both semantic and latent levels. The length of segments coded ranged from a sentence to several paragraphs. Code labels were brief and active (Charmaz, 2006) and summarized the main idea behind the text segment being coded. Several text segments were assigned more than one code. During this phase, the author looked to identify and code for similarities and differences across transcripts (Terry, 2016). The list of initial codes was then used to begin to generate themes (phase 3). Specifically, the author looked for patterns among codes that were relevant to the research question and present across multiple cases (Clarke & Braun, 2016). In doing so, some codes were clustered and collapsed to form provisional themes while others were discarded (Terry, 2016). The author also used thematic mapping to help examine and sort codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Provisional themes were then reviewed for further refinement (phase 4). This was accomplished by testing the applicability of the themes against all coded data within that theme. The author then tested

provisional themes against the entire data set to check for goodness of fit. Themes were accordingly modified to ensure that each theme was distinct, coherent, and informative. Those themes that did not relate to the research in a meaningful way were abandoned. The author also shared themes with her advisor, who served as an external auditor, and together, they examined and discussed the coherence and strength of the themes. Once finalized, themes were given names and definitions (phase 5). The author reviewed the data and notes once more to ensure that themes were clearly defined. Illustrative data extracts were selected to be used in the reporting of the findings (phase 6).

Rigor

A critical realist perspective assumes that any account of the phenomenon under investigation is a distortion of reality, but it also recognizes that some accounts will be closer to reality than others (Fletcher, 2017). More accurate interpretations are likely those that provide a comprehensive conceptualization of the phenomenon that describes and explains patterns in the data, attending closely to causal mechanisms and processes (Clark, 2008). Accuracy of an account is related to the rigor with which a study is designed, implemented, and analyzed. A variety of strategies for ensuring rigor in qualitative research exist, but within a critical realist approach, rigor is evaluated based on the strength of the connection between the account of the phenomenon offered by the researcher and what is observed in the data (Houston, 2010). In this study, rigor was established using the 15-point checklist put forth by Braun and Clarke (2006) for “good thematic analysis.” The checklist follows the analysis process from the transcription of the data to the writing of the final report. The specific criteria include:

1. The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
2. Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
3. Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
4. All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated.
5. Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
6. Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
7. Data have been analyzed - interpreted, made sense of - rather than just paraphrased or described.
8. Analysis and data match each other - the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
9. Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.
10. A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
11. Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
12. The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
13. There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done - i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
14. The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.

15. The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'. (p. 96)

To ensure that the author was active and critically engaged, the author maintained a research diary throughout the research process. This diary included personal reflections, observations from the interviews, and process notes about hypotheses and decisions that occurred during analysis. While finalizing themes, the author also had weekly auditing sessions with her advisor, who is a counseling psychologist with extensive knowledge and experience with resilience research and qualitative methodology. These sessions provided the author with opportunities to review, clarify, and refine developing ideas and interpretations (Shenton, 2004). As an external auditor, the author's advisor also helped to ensure continued reflexivity by challenging any assumptions made by the author about the data (Shenton, 2004).

Chapter 4: Results

The process of data analysis using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) resulted in the identification of four main themes: Perceptions of Otherness, Utilizing Cultural Resources, Having Purpose to Overcome, and Self and Identity Development. These themes as well as the subthemes within them relate to the research question and provide new understanding of the role of ethnicity and gender in participants' experiences of academic resilience. Results are discussed in detail below.

Theme 1: Perceptions of Otherness

Participants reported facing numerous adversities throughout their educational careers. Due to the format of the interview protocol, participants would begin the interview by describing one or two challenges they had faced. However, over the course of the interview, all participants would inevitably describe or disclose other obstacles that they have had to overcome on their road to academic success. These obstacles varied and were either related, indirectly related, or not at all related to the participants' identities as Latinas. This included experiences of discrimination, financial concerns, sexual assault, physical and mental health issues, academic difficulties, and limited educational resources. While each story of academic resilience was unique, there was a consistent and significant theme of *Perception of Otherness* that ran through the interviews collected.

Perception of otherness in the current context referred to participants feeling or viewing themselves as different, less than, disadvantaged, or not belonging due to their Latina identity. For some participants, this sense of otherness occurred early in their education. Veronica, for example, stated that it started when she was just six-years-old. She explained that after immigrating to the United States from Mexico, she was placed into

Kindergarten at a local public elementary school. Since she did not know English and only spoke Spanish at the time, Veronica stated that she was treated differently from the other students in the classroom. As an example, Veronica shared that often times the teacher, who did speak Spanish, would tell her to go sit in the corner and work on a puzzle while she gave the lesson in English to the rest of the class. Veronica said that at the time she “didn’t know what it meant” but that being seen and treated as different made her feel “bad.” Veronica shared that this feeling persisted throughout her schooling as she continued to “meet teachers who have the assumption that children of color aren’t as successful or won’t be as successful.” She noted that in high school, she had a counselor who “refused” to help her apply to any selective state universities because “she didn’t think I’d make it.”

Other participants described high school as a time when their feelings of otherness became more heightened. Beatriz, for example, spoke about how school administrators would frequently visit her home to confirm that she in fact lived at that location and was attending the correct high school, which predominately had students who were white and wealthy. When asked about how she understood why this was happening, Beatriz stated, “I think the reason was because they put a label on me...like that I’m Mexican-American...and they thought less of me.” Beatriz shared that feeling different from her peers made her “ashamed” of her ethnic identity because “I didn’t look like the rest of the people there. So I automatically I would feel like the outcast.” Joselyn, who also attended a high school in which the majority of students were white and affluent, stated that she too was very aware that she looked different from her peers. She explained that throughout high school, she would “sit in class and...hear people saying racist things sometimes about me or sometimes just about the general race.” Joselyn shared that those experiences “put me down” and made

her feel that her peers were “always going to be better than me,” which negatively impacted her academic performance and aspirations. Another consequence of experiencing racism in high school, according to Joselyn, was that she “always wanted to be white” and would try dressing like her white peers to fit in. She explained, “I always felt like I was different, and I saw being different as that thing that hurt me.”

For the majority of participants, however, otherness perceptions were precipitated by the move away from home and beginning of college. This transition was commonly described by participants as a “shock” and was poignantly explained by Juanita:

It's like culture shock when you come here and you notice like, wow, you're not the majority anymore. Like how I was in my town, everyone was brown. Everyone spoke Spanish. Everyone kind of came from similar households and everyone was economically equal... that's my community. So I never really got accustomed to what a world outside of that could look like. So coming here I felt like, whoa, it's really different.

This sentiment was echoed by numerous participants. Ana stated that coming to college was “eye-opening” because before doing so, she thought “everyone was like me” and was “never aware” that she was different while living at home. Similarly, Lisette discussed how she did not feel different from her peers while attending community college because the majority of her peers were Latinx. However, in transferring to her current university, Lisette stated that she felt “the full-on difference”: “I looked around and I was like, there's nobody like me here.” Jasmine, on the other hand, shared that while she was aware that she was “not white” because she grew up in a Latinx community, it was not until she started college that “people

would point out that I was Mexican American or that I was Latina” and that she realized “that type of stuff mattered here.”

After getting over the initial “culture shock,” participants’ perceptions of otherness were reinforced by their experiences and interactions in the classroom. Maria spoke about being “the only brown woman” in one of her STEM classes and described an experience when her professor made Maria feel “alone” and that “something was wrong” with her. Maria explained how she was struggling with the course material and attended her professor’s office hours for help. Instead of receiving support, however, Maria reported that her professor told her that she should consider dropping the course since the other students, who Maria stated were all white, were not struggling like she was. Another example comes from Perla who commented that she had a lot of anxiety attending her classes during her first year in college, explaining:

I had the idea in my head that some students, like the white students, probably see me and think ‘Oh, she's a Latina student, first generation, she's probably not going to do as great as I will’...because I didn't grow up with the same background as them, same privileges, like, I'm not as well prepared to take these classes.

Although Perla acknowledged that her fears were based on an assumption, she described an incident during one of her classes that confirmed what she thought. Perla explained that the topic of DACA came up one time during class and that the other students expressed many anti-immigrant beliefs. She stated while she is not a DACA recipient, the students’ statements “struck a chord” and made her “tear up” in class. Perla shared, “That just really made me think ‘Okay, yes, students do actually see me differently because I am Latina.’”

Perceptions of otherness resulting from microaggressions and other experiences of identity-based discrimination were also commonly endorsed by participants. Ana, for example, shared that she is often “the darkest person in the room” and feels “microaggressions here and there,” especially when there are discussions around social issues. Juanita noted that despite her university being designated an HSI, she felt that many professors lacked “cultural sensitivity” and made her feel like she was “in a zoo” because they would make comments regarding her Latina identity. As an example, she detailed one interaction with a professor in which the professor asked Juanita several times where she was from. Raquel also commented on the lack of diversity and sensitivity among the faculty. She also reported experiencing microaggressions with university staff. Raquel shared that when she was interviewing for an on-campus job with the facilities department, the staff member, who was white, asked Raquel if she spoke Spanish. When Raquel confirmed that she did speak Spanish, the staff member told her, “Oh perfect, you're going to get along well here.”

Regardless of when or how participants’ perceptions of otherness developed, it was clear that the effect of these experiences was negative. Participants frequently commented that it made them feel like they “don’t belong” or were “not good enough.” Feelings of loneliness and depressed mood were also commonly endorsed. In terms of how otherness perceptions impacted participants’ academics, participants reported becoming “disengaged” or unmotivated. Jasmine, for example, shared that she does not participate as much “because of the other white kids or because the professor is white.” Other participants noted feeling “uncomfortable” or hesitant to seek out help from professors or university staff due to fears of being misunderstood or mistreated. For instance, Juanita stated that she developed “fear”

around seeking academic advice because she believed that her professors thought that she did not belong there as a Latina immigrant. A few participants even noted thinking about withdrawing and several participants reported changing majors because they were academically struggling and did not feel supported by people in their department.

Theme 2: Utilizing Cultural Resources

This theme included the ways in which participants leveraged their cultural identities to overcome adversity and be successful in school. Two subthemes were identified and are detailed below.

“I’m Here Because of the Support of My Family”: Familial Capital

During the interviews, family support was presented as essential to participants’ experiences of academic resilience. “There for me no matter what” and “always have my back” were phrases frequently used by participants to characterize their families’ support. Additionally, the majority of participants identified family as their primary source of emotional support while overcoming. In some cases, family was their only source of emotional support as participants had no other outlets to rely on or felt uncomfortable seeking help from people outside of the family system.

When prompted to describe family support in further detail, participants primarily spoke about how their families provided them with verbal encouragement and reassurance. Juanita, for example, stated, “My family helps me through my challenges just by being that cheering squad and just by telling me like reassuring words.” Similarly, Marisol shared, “My parents are always like, ‘You can do it. You’re a smart kid.’ They always try to be supportive so that's been really helpful.” Perla noted how it was helpful to have someone “just to listen to me” during times of stress. While she acknowledged that her family could

get “frustrated” with her, she credited her family for listening to her “regardless of what was going on” and giving her “unconditional support.” Ana also reported receiving unconditional support from her parents when describing how they helped her when she withdrew for a quarter due to mental health concerns during her second year in college. She stated, “They picked me up...and they reassured me that whatever I choose to do, that I'm never gonna be able to disappoint them, and I guess that was my biggest concern.” Although most participants described seeking family support either by calling or by going home and visiting, it was also common to hear of family members, such as parents and cousins, “reaching out” to participants via phone call or text and “checking in” on them frequently to make sure that they were doing well. Beatriz, for instance, spoke about support she receives from her aunts and cousins:

They even call me and say, ‘Hey, how are you doing? Do you need anything?’ Stuff like that. So I think that helps a lot. And just always pushing me, saying, ‘Hey, I know you could do this. I know you're doing a good job.’

In addition to providing emotional support, many participants recalled how their families, particularly their parents, were the first to encourage education and to inspire them to have academic aspirations. In fact, some participants like Marisol and Ana remembered their parents telling them starting in grade school that they had to go to college. In providing a similar perspective, Elma described the impact of her parents’ value of education:

They were really big on education, and they always told me things like, ‘You're going to go to college. I'm going to see you graduate.’ So I think that really helped me. That someone believed in me, and it helped me believe in those types of dreams for myself...So yeah, they’ve always instilled value on an education...I just like

grew up with that and I like it too. I'm not sure if I would have the same views if they didn't instill it so much.

Despite the majority of participants characterizing the role of family as positive, some participants did acknowledge the limitations of family support. Maria, for example, spoke about a period during her first quarter in college when she was failing her biology classes and how her family was not able to help her in the way that she needed. She stated, "My family was telling me I could figure it out, but I was like, 'Yeah, I can, but I don't know how.' And they couldn't tell me how either. I mean, they don't understand how it works." It seemed that for these participants, families could not necessarily offer more than emotional support as the majority of the participants were first-generation college students. Of those non-first-generation students, their parents either attended college in another country or only completed a semester or two at a U.S. college, and thus, still had limited knowledge of the U.S. higher education system. Additionally, some participants noted that language barriers impeded their parents from being able to fully engage in their children's education. However, participants did report receiving financial support from family, which was critical for them to be able to attend college. A few participants also reported using older siblings or cousins who were in college or had a degree for informational support.

Regardless of the type of the support they received from family members, participants directly attributed their family support to their Latina identity. This was exemplified by Perla, who described the connection between her culture and the role of family in overcoming culture shock and mental health issues while in college:

I think just coming from a Latina, female, background and being very family oriented. Like a lot of the things I do, I involve my family with. I guess that is a

Latina thing, being very close to your family, being very family oriented. And so that's played a huge role and why I consider myself successful because if I didn't have my family to talk to and get their support during this time it probably would have been very difficult for me. I probably wouldn't have done it.

Aleen also commented on the benefits of belonging to a culture that values family connection:

I think having come from a culture where I can call my mom every day. Like there's no strange stigma around that. I don't feel alone in the same way I think I would feel alone...there's like the few white people I know and...they seem so alone. Like they talk to like their mom, but it's not like the same level of closeness. There's a lot more arguing, a lot more like schisms in the family...and I feel like my family is just more together and I know that no matter what happens, even if everything like crashes and burns, I have them. And that's something that I feel very, very, very, very happy to have.

Similarly, Beatriz, in attributing her academic success to the support of her family, observed how white students do not have the support of their families in the same way she does and noted that they seem “kind of lost in the world.” Several participants like Jasmine and Juanita also spoke about how their culture’s value of family helped them overcome because they knew they “could go home” if they failed. Angelica further explained:

So like American culture...they don't really have these values...they're more independent and once you're 18, you're out of the house and you got your own life. But being a Mexican and a Hispanic person, I know that my parents have an empty

room for me waiting back home...so yeah, that's been helpful. Like knowing that I always have them to fall back on, no matter what.

Finally, it is worth noting that while participants often spoke about family as a whole, mothers as well as other female family members stood out as being especially instrumental in participants overcoming and being successful in school. For example, Juanita shared:

I feel that no matter what happens, my mom's always going to be there...And I feel like even if she doesn't understand, she always understands how I feel. There'll be times when I'll call her and I'll break down crying and then she'll be like, 'Okay. Ya lloraste.' Like you cried, you're good. Like go, ándale. And that really helps cause it's like motivation.

Juanita also spoke about her mother being a “strong mujer” and how her mother’s strength set an example for her and contributed to her being able to overcome. Maria described her mother and aunts similarly, stating that they made her and her female cousins feel “as Latinas we just have this power inside of us... like we are in charge of what we’re doing, not to feel like I'm disadvantaged in anyway.” Maria also noted how her mother and aunts defended her when she was failing her classes during her first year in college. She explained that her father suggested that she come home, but her mother and aunts encouraged her to stay and expressed belief in her ability to overcome. In a similar fashion, Raquel shared that there was not always “explicit support” from her father to pursue higher education, but her mother always told her, “You got to keep going even if you move away from home. You have to go to college. You have to keep going.”

“It’s a Space Where You Feel Understood”: Finding Connection and Community

In addition to utilizing family support, participants also described overcoming and being successful in school by seeking and creating social support from peers and others who share in their ethnic and/or gender identities. The most commonly reported way that students found community was by joining student-run cultural organizations and clubs. Maria, for instance, discussed how joining a Latina student organization her second year in college helped her feel “not alone” and “not crazy,” which in turn enabled her to push through the challenges she was facing at the time. She explained, “I feel like once I was able to find like a close group of strong, driven women, it like bounced off on me, and I started to be driven.” In a similar fashion, Angelica shared that being part of a Latina student organization “gave me a sense of community...because we’re all striving for the same goals and we all have the same circumstances.” Lisette, who belonged to a Latina sorority, stated that she felt “empowered” by the other women in her organization because they “understand my history and who I am.” Although she was not officially part of the organization, Raquel discussed the impact of attending an activity hosted by a student group for Latinx STEM students: “I went and I was like, ‘Wow, these are all Latinos.’ Suddenly I felt like I was like a part of something...and everyone was really nice and like suddenly I saw myself in a lot of people.” Similarly, Juanita described how attending a community event called “Bienvenida” inspired her to work through the culture shock she experienced during her first year in college:

I looked around, and I saw all the brown kids I had never seen before...and just seeing the smiles on their faces and the loudness and proudness of other women that looked like me. I was like, ‘I want to do that. Like I want to be you.’ So I guess that I came to a realization that I don't have to be in a little bubble. Like I can be happy. I

can be motivated...and I just said, 'Okay, *ponte las pilas*' [Get to work]. Like it's time to get out and do something.

For participants who did not report belonging to any formal social organization or attending any community events, they described finding connection by building strong friendships with a small group of peers. These peers were either Latinx or identified as racial/ethnic minorities. Joselyn, for example, stated that after graduating from a predominately white high school, she made a small group of friends who "understood my struggles" and motivated her to "work hard and study" when she started community college. Elma indicated that "building a little community" of friends while volunteering at the women's center during her third year of college helped her work through adjustment difficulties she faced. Veronica reflected on a time in high school when she and a group of friends banded together to help each other apply for college:

Me and my group of friends were able to motivate each other when we were told we couldn't apply to certain schools or we shouldn't apply to certain schools. We pushed each other and we were like, 'Who cares. We'll figure this out together.' Like, when the adults don't want to help us because they don't think we're going to succeed, we're going to help each other.

Several participants mentioned also finding connection and community by taking Chicana/o Studies courses. When asked about how these classes were helpful in overcoming, participants spoke about gaining a greater and more positive understanding of self and their culture. Beatriz, for example, shared, "I started to learn more about my history of who I was and what it means to be Chicana." Similarly, Juanita stated, "It definitely helps to have like Chicano studies classes because those are spaces where you understand yourself more...like

you understand why things are how they are.” Maria asserted that the environment of these classes compared to her STEM classes was “more positive” and made her feel “so much stronger as a woman of color.” She further expounded:

Everybody's brown. Like we all come from similar backgrounds and it felt so much calmer. Like everybody was like, ‘All right, we got this.’ ... I feel like we all felt liked we belonged... I feel like something in these classes just affirm us. Like they affirm that we can do things for our community. Like we can put in work to make the experiences so much better.

The way in which finding connection and community helped participants overcome varied. Some participants spoke about becoming more confident. “I used to be really shy and really insecure and so this organization really helped me embrace who I am and like branch out,” stated Lisette. Other participants discussed how it helped them improve their academic performance. Juanita, for example, shared that “developing a voice” through her Latina student organization helped her speak up in class more. She also commented that having a “space to openly voice my stress” with people who can empathize helped her improve her grades because her mental health improved, and she was better able to concentrate in class. Veronica, on the other hand, spoke about how joining a Latinx student group in high school helped her maintain her sense of cultural identity while overcoming adversity:

I didn't want to be like somebody who tried to erase or forget the culture that they came from in order to achieve higher education...so I did search for groups that were centered around like the value of culture and the value of education.

However, the most commonly cited benefit of seeking and creating social support with people who share in their ethnic and/or gender identities was that it provided them with a sense of belonging. This was exemplified by Aleen, who stated:

Sometimes it feels like this is not necessarily a place where we're supposed to belong...but finding other people who are in the same situation, who feel the same thing, it makes me realize that no, this is a place for us.

Having a sense of belonging was critical for many participants, especially while in college, because they found themselves away from home and in “white spaces,” sometimes for the first time. As Maria described it:

I feel like it was just because I had so much community at home...So when I got here it's like, no one cares about what I have to say. No one cares if I really succeed or not. If I fail this class, I'm going to fail that class. Like they're going to keep going. So when I found my org and like good friends, they're like, ‘No. Listen. Like I'm hearing you like let's think it out like process.’ I was just thinking to myself and like no one else was really hearing what I was thinking, so I couldn't process things. I felt like I didn't have anybody.

Similarly, Juanita shared, “It's just hard to try to make these spaces home. So I think that is why it's so important to like find spaces where other people connect with your background or like your stories.” Thus, for the many participants, the connections that they formed and the communities that they built seemed to recreate or supplement the sense of community that they had at home. Moreover, it provided a space for them to “safely” be themselves, express their thoughts and feelings, and to seek help from people without fear of judgment or misunderstanding. Finally, in providing a sense of belonging, participants’ social support

helped them believe that not only can they persevere, but that they can also “thrive...and grow as a person.”

Theme 3: Having Purpose to Overcome

This theme captured participant’s reasons for overcoming. That is, participants discussed what motivated them to push through the various obstacles they faced so that they could be successful in school. Three subthemes were identified from participants’ accounts and are explained below.

“I Owe It to Them”: Honoring Parents’ Sacrifices

All but one participant cited their parents as their reason for overcoming adversity and being successful in school. Specifically, participants spoke about the sacrifices their parents made in order to give them better educational opportunities and how doing well in school was a way they could honor those sacrifices. “Give back to them,” “make them proud,” and “make it worth it” or variations of these phrases were used by participants to describe how they wanted to honor their parents’ sacrifices. For example, when identifying her motivation for overcoming and doing well in school, Veronica stated, “Knowing that my parents put up with a lot of things in life to be able to give me what I have makes me want to do it for them. It makes me want to give back to them.” Likewise, Perla shared:

I’m very inspired by them, and I think that's the main reason why I keep going. Like if they went through all that, then I need to make them proud as well as show them that all that work, all those hardships they went through, weren't for nothing, like they mean something.

Maria echoed a similar sentiment when reflecting on her parents and their sacrifices:

I feel like I carry that with me as like I want to make them proud...Like they did so much for me and worked around what I needed... I just want to repay. Like I want to let them know that it's all worth it and it's all gonna pay off.

In terms of parents' sacrifices, most participants spoke about their parents' experiences immigrating to the United States and the hardships they faced living in a new country.

Joselyn, for instance, discussed the barriers her father encountered when he came to the U.S. at the age of 20 without knowing any English. She also described the hostile conditions her mother faced while crossing the border:

I can't picture humans going through that, like crossing through the desert and being away from your family like that. So yeah. A lot of it comes down to my parents and just remembering their stories from back home and like what they had to do to get here. Just reminding me that I have to work hard. You can't fall behind. That helped me overcome.

Another participant, Angelica, reported that her parents "sacrificed their whole life, careers, to come here and start from scratch," explaining that her mother was a registered nurse and her father was a police officer in Mexico but now both work cleaning houses. When asked about the impact her parents had on her experience of academic resilience, she stated:

Ever since I was little, I used to feel so ashamed and guilty because I felt like it was my fault that they gave me this better life by making their lives really terrible. And um, I just want to give back to them because I want them to know like, 'Hey, I remember what you did. I remember all the work you put in to get me here. And like, this isn't just my degree...this is what we earned. Like, we did this together.'

Other participants spoke about being successful in school as a way to “fulfill” their parents’ own hopes and aspirations. Upon reflecting on her motivation to overcome and continue with her education, Beatriz stated, “I’m doing this because I know my parents came to America for something. And I feel like, in a way, I’m fulfilling what they came for.” Aleen conveyed a similar perspective: “I want to fulfill the dream of my parents. Like my parents are very low socioeconomic status here...so it feels like I’m doing something for them and for the family to be like, ‘Hey, we made it up here.’” Juanita, on the other hand, recounted how her parents dreamed of going to college but never did because they were told that “college is only for doctors and lawyers.” In reflecting on the importance and meaning of her pushing through and succeeding in school, Juanita shared:

I feel like I have to represent for them because if they had the chance, they'd probably would have taken it. So I have to represent for them, and I also have to take advantage of what's a possibility for me now...So just knowing that it's a possibility for me, pushed me to be like, ‘Okay, you have to do this.’ Because like, ‘How dare you if you don't.’ Because no one in my family ever had a chance. Like this was never a possibility.

When asked whether they had received any explicit messages about needing to “repay” their parents for their sacrifices, participants acknowledged that while they did feel an intense, internal sense of pressure to do well in school, their desire to “give back” came from a place of love, “empathy”, and gratitude for their parents. For example, Ana stated, “No one has told me I have to do it. But I’m very close to my parents and they’ve made so many sacrifices for me that I feel like the least I could do is give back to them.” Similarly, Marisol shared:

I really love my parents and so I feel like if I succeed in a way they're succeeding because it's like, 'Well, my kid did good. I did a good job raising my child.' So yeah, I just don't want to let them down because I know they've been through so much and I don't think that'd be fair to them because they've always been there for me. They've provided for me and still do. So I just want to thank them and I feel like doing well in school and being prepared is my way of thanking them.

Nevertheless, a few participants did note how being successful in school not only served as a way to honor their parents' sacrifices, but also provided them with the means to be able to financially give back to them. For example, Aleen stated, "I'm going to school in order to get a career, and the career is so I can earn money so that I can provide for my parents." Ana expressed a similar desire to take care of her parents in the future: "I've seen how hard they worked, and I just want to give them the best life when they're older, and I know they won't be able to work cause they're tired." Angelica identified more specific ways she wanted to "spoil" her parents such as buying them a house and car while Juanita spoke about wanting to pay for her parents to go on a vacation.

"I'm Doing Some Type of Change for Me and for Others": Creating Change for Self and Others

In addition to identifying parents as a reason for overcoming, participants also described how they were motivated to persevere and do well in order to change their personal and family circumstances. This was exemplified by Veronica, who described the significance of her being successful in school:

It means I get to have a better life...It means I get to help my parents. It means I get to give my siblings a good role model, and ultimately, I'm hoping it means that I will be happier in life.

As previously noted in Theme 1, participants faced a wide range of obstacles and hardships throughout their educational careers. While these adversities made it harder for participants to be successful in school, all participants expressed belief in the idea that education would help improve their life circumstances and futures. For example, when asked about what motivated her to overcome these adversities, Joselyn stated:

I think just for myself. I can talk about my family and my sister a lot. But it's also what I want for myself. I want a better life and I don't want to be like my cousins, like my childhood friends. Some of them didn't even graduate high school, and I see what their life is like now. And I just didn't want that for my life...like, it's not like a game. This my future. So I think that motivated me.

Lisette reflected on how she would become “10 times more motivated” to succeed after going home on the weekends from college. She explained that being in that environment would remind her of “what I have to do for myself...to get out of the cycle” of poverty. Similarly, Ana noted that “a high school diploma doesn't mean anything anymore” and commented that she wants to get her degree so she can “get a good job” and “get out of the neighborhood I live in.” Jasmine, who had a turbulent home life while growing up, expressed similar motivations: “I need to watch out for myself. And I think that was one of my main drives for receiving an education, like just to get out of the house, get out of there.”

Some participants spoke about changing their circumstances in terms of not having to “struggle” as their parents have. This was poignantly highlighted by Raquel, who said that

she often thinks about her father, a gardener, in moments when she feels deflated about school:

My dad always tells me, ‘Study now so that you don't have to work like a donkey like I do.’ I know that's like the worst thing you can say about yourself, but I understand. It's a good reminder that you see the opportunities and take them.”

Veronica reported receiving similar advice from her parents:

I came up in a Mexican household and both my parents were immigrants so I've always seen them work really, really, hard, like multiple jobs. They taught me that to be successful in life I had to get an education because it would minimize the potential of me ever having to work as hard as they do...also in order to be able to do what you want in life and not have to work the jobs that they worked.

For other participants, the motivation to overcome and be successful in school was related to more than just improving their career options. It was also about expanding their opportunities and life choices as women. Specifically, a few participants spoke about how doing well in school was a way to prevent teen pregnancy or delay motherhood. Teresa shared that her mother dropped out of high school when she became pregnant and stated, “It was the fact that that happened to so many people in my parents’ generation. It kind of scared me. Like I don't want to be in the same boat as that. So that encouraged me to be successful.” Although her parents had her much later in life, Aleen acknowledged having similar fears, stating:

I feel a lot of pressure that if I don't succeed in school, the only other option is going to be me getting married and then raising children. And I guess it's not bad... but I don't feel like I need that. I don't feel sometimes like I even, like, want that.

Jasmine did not speak directly to any fears about pregnancy or motherhood, but did note the limitations that “machismo and the patriarch tradition” places on women within her community and how that influenced her decision to continue her education rather than get a job. She explained that she felt she “would receive more as a woman” if she “stepped out” of her community and pursued a “different path” than what other women she grew up with followed. Jasmine was also hopeful that by breaking the norm in her community and getting a college degree she would show her nieces and younger cousins that while “education might not be the cure all solution...it’s still an achievement and it’s something that opens doors to other opportunities.”

Jasmine was not the only participant who voiced a desire to have a positive impact on others through their academic resilience. In fact, it was just as common for participants to express being motivated to better the lives of others as it was their own. This was succinctly stated by Lisette, who asserted, “What motivated me? Me knowing I have to do it for not only myself but my family.” Of those participants who had younger siblings or cousins, all of them described how being a “role model” within the family “pushed” them to continue being successful in school. For instance, Angelica shared that she was motivated to finish her degree despite experiencing several setbacks in college because she wanted to be able to “answer questions” and provide “extra guidance” to her cousins who were applying to college. She stated, “I just want to reassure them that they're strong, and they can get through it... I'm like a living proof.” Similarly, Aleen spoke at length about the significance of being the first in her family to go to college and being motivated to finish her degree so her niece can see her graduate. She stated, “I want her to see me succeed...and like I very

much want her to know that it's possible even if things aren't possible, like that's not true. They're impossible until they're possible.” Veronica echoed Aleen’s sentiment:

I wanted to start a trend I guess. Or like do something to motivate the other children in my family to want better because I do have cousins who their only dream is to get married and have children and take care of the house. Like that's it. And if that's what people want to do then that's awesome, but I just feel like the reason they want it is because they don't know they can do more. I feel like, it's kinda the default thing.

And so I want to show them that that's not the case. That there's more possibilities.

While most participants focused on the positive impact they could have on their current families, a few participants mentioned wanting to build a better future for their future children. Teresa, for example, spoke about “starting a legacy” so that it will be easier for her children to go to college. Similarly, Ana shared that she was motivated to continue her education and “become a professional” so that she can help her children in ways that her parents could not help her (e.g., financially, academically). In thinking about how she “only saw white people succeed” while growing up, Joselyn stated that she was motivated to “give hope” to her future children by having them “see different colors and genders at the top and not just white males at the top.”

Finally, it is worth noting that the majority of participants reported wanting to pursue a career in a helping profession after graduating from college. This included careers such as school counselor, psychologist, doctor, and educator. Furthermore, most of these participants were resolved to return to their home communities in order to “give back” and “make an impact.” Thus, participants’ motivation to create change extended beyond themselves and their families.

“I Want to Break the Stereotype”: Resisting Inequality and Marginalization

Some participants described how being academically resilient served as a way for them to resist societal and cultural inequality and marginalization. Specifically, these participants stated that they were motivated to overcome and succeed in order to challenge negative beliefs people have about Latinas. Joselyn, for example, spoke about how it was important to her to do well in school because she wanted to “break the stereotype” that Latinas cannot be as successful as “white men,” a belief she once held herself. Angelica stated that she also wanted to “break the stereotype” that “Mexicans don’t go to college.” She elaborated:

It’s not true what they say. There's a lot of hard-working Hispanics and Latinos out there. And so, just breaking that stereotype I guess has really helped me overcome challenges because I feel like if I wasn't part of such a strong culture I would probably lose myself. But I'm really grounded, and I know who I am.

Raquel, on the other hand, framed her motivation as “putting a good name to the Latino culture.” Elma discussed wanting to “put my identities in a positive light.” She also explained how knowing that society has lower expectations of her because she is Latina is something that she uses “to motivate myself to do better and do the best that I can.” Marisol, on the other hand, reflected on how the current anti-immigrant climate impacted her motivation, explaining:

I just feel like I need to succeed to show that we're hardworking and that we can do it too even though we don't come from as privileged backgrounds. Like we still have the ability to succeed and do well.

In a couple of instances, participants stated that they were also challenging Latina cultural gender norms by being successful in school. Raquel, for example, shared that she felt “empowered” knowing that she was “fighting” against “machismo” and “breaking cultural boundaries” on what Latinas are capable of doing by moving away from home and going to college. Angelica iterated a similar perspective:

I feel like succeeding in school should be important regardless but especially as a Latina because a lot of Latina women are oppressed by like, *machista* culture saying that women belong in the kitchen or that women can't read and things like that. And I just want to break away from that and...let young women know that they can be whatever they want.

Aside from breaking stereotypes, participants also described being motivated to do well in school in order to improve representation of Latinas. This sentiment was particularly prominent among participants who were majoring in STEM fields. Marisol shared how not seeing many students who “look” like her in her science classes gives her “an extra push and makes me a little bit more ambitious to try to do better.” Maria described feeling “alone” as a Latina in STEM, but stated that she was resolved to continue, declaring, “I can do this for Latinas. Like we need to be in these spaces. We should be in these spaces. Like it shouldn't be so white in here.” Similarly, Ana, who plans to become a doctor, stated that she feels “inspired” by the fact that the field she wants to enter “lacks diversity and female models.” Lastly, although not pursuing a STEM degree, Juanita reported feeling motivated to improve representation of Latinas on college campuses, stating, “Just knowing that the world doesn't think you belong here is like another motivation to overcome every challenge that they throw at you, that like the institution throws at you.”

Theme 4: Self and Identity Development

This theme captured the different ways in which participants' understanding of themselves and their Latina identities evolved as a result of experiencing and overcoming adversity. Two subthemes were identified and are explained below.

“I’m Strong and I’m Capable”: Enhanced Sense of Self

Participants shared how working through their various personal and academic challenges affected their sense of self. Specifically, all participants identified positive changes to their beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about themselves after overcoming these adversities. The majority of participants stated that they saw themselves as “stronger” and “more capable.” Teresa, for example, shared how overcoming major health and financial crises during her second year in college meant that she was a “tough cookie...capable of handling anything” while Maria asserted that she felt “much more powerful” after working through several academic setbacks in college. Additionally, Lisette found that overcoming experiences of discrimination as a Latina in STEM gave her greater resolve to fulfill her goals: “I can do anything I set my mind to...regardless of the challenges. Regardless of the people. Regardless of anything that's coming my way. Like I will continue. I will do what I need to do.”

Other participants described their personal growth post adversity as becoming more “mature” and highlighted how overcoming adversity equipped them with important life skills. For some participants, such as Jasmine, that meant learning how to attend to and prioritize their physical and mental health. Aleen, on the other hand, proudly spoke about her new ability to cook for herself as well as manage her own finances, things that she previously relied on her parents for. Another skill acquired following adversity that was

commonly noted by participants was the ability to ask for help. For example, Maria spoke about how her ability to cope and access support in the face of challenges improved after overcoming culture shock and academic difficulties:

I just feel stronger. It's like when problems come at me now I know how to deal with them. I know now where to process them. I know people who I can talk to and help me...because I wasn't looking for help before, and I was putting everything on myself. So I just see like the power and the good that there is in just seeking help and just being able to handle stuff.

In addition to increased maturity, an enhanced sense of competence and greater self-confidence were also frequently endorsed by participants. Such changes were best exemplified by Juanita, who stated, “The way I viewed myself changed. Like I see myself with more, much more confidence and um, much more just like knowledge. Like I, I feel like I know what I'm doing now.”

During the interview, Juanita spoke in great detail about the culture shock she felt as a first-generation immigrant and college student moving from “the barrio” to a four-year university. In addition to experiencing significant dissonance between these two environments, Juanita stated that throughout her first year she felt like she did not belong at the university and constantly questioned whether she deserved to be there. As she struggled to “find space” and navigate her new cultural and academic environment, Juanita began to believe that she would not be able to be academically successful in college because other students, white students specifically, had “inside knowledge” about the collegiate experience that put them “above” her. This discouragement and dejection significantly diminished

Juanita's motivation for school, and she soon found herself isolating in her dorm room and skipping classes.

While Juanita acknowledged that she was “guilty of letting that [culture shock] have sunken me a little bit,” she stated that she worked to push past her fears and worries and slowly engaged more with her new environment and peers. For Juanita, that meant “occupying more spaces” by speaking up in her classes, going to office hours, and joining several student groups. Learning how to navigate her new environment and seeing her grades improve empowered Juanita to not only challenge her negative self-beliefs, but to also expand her ideas about who she is and what she is capable of accomplishing. Juanita shared:

I always thought I'd be just enough or, or maybe slightly above average, but I never thought I'd be like the best at something or a standout. So I feel that was one of those moments where I said, 'Hey, if I could be a stand out academically, I could be a stand out everywhere.' Like anywhere I put myself...like be a leader and um, be the person that's looked up to, or um, I could have the answers when somebody needs them. Um, rather than be a seeker of answers.

Juanita was not the only participant who acknowledged that they had defied their own expectations of what was possible. In describing her growth after surviving a sexual assault her second year in college, Angelica stated, “I didn't know that I could be this version of myself...that when the stakes are raised, I can still like, you know, surpass.” Perla described having a similar revelation: “I discovered a lot about myself that I didn't realize...like in overcoming these challenges, I think you realize who you really are, and like what you're capable of doing.” Joselyn, who reported the highest GPA of all participants, repeated

several times throughout her interview that she was “so proud” of herself and her academic achievements because she had long believed that she would not even graduate high school. Like Joselyn, Beatriz also endorsed having low expectations of herself. Specifically, she shared during the interview that she grew up believing that she was not capable of accomplishing anything of significance because she was Chicana and poor. Yet in overcoming adversity throughout her academic career, Beatriz stated that she now believed it possible for her to create change not only for herself but also society. Finally, Elma spoke about how defying stereotypes and others’ expectations helped her have more faith in her own abilities:

I believe in myself more... I mean despite all those things I grew up with, like the mean words that my peers would say sometimes or like in college, like that experience, it's just despite all that, despite what people would say, like I could still do it despite what they thought of me.

“We’re More”: Reconstructing Latina Identity

In addition to experiencing an enhanced sense of self after overcoming adversity, participants described also developing positive and expansive attitudes and beliefs about their Latina identity. Specifically, participants stated that they felt “proud” of being Latina and directly attributed this shift in perspective to their experience of academic resilience. This was exemplified by Joselyn, who asserted that being academically successful in college helped her embrace her identity. Joselyn explained that in high school she wanted to “be white...not brown” and would publicly disavow her Mexican identity because of the racism she experienced by her white peers. It was not until she began to academically excel despite her peers’ racist remarks that Joselyn “realized that being Latina isn’t bad.” Furthermore,

upon reflecting on how her sense of identity changed over the course of her resilience journey, Joselyn stated:

I'm definitely proud of it now like my identity of being Latino, being a woman. I feel it just proves that anything is possible...and it kind of gave me the mentality later on that I have to work harder. So that definitely helped me because I did work harder. I'm happy."

Ana expressed a similar sentiment in regard to her experiences. Despite having undocumented Mexican parents and growing up in a predominately Latino community, Ana admitted that she felt "kind of whitewashed" because she did not identify with "certain aspects" of Latina culture. However, in the process of overcoming and becoming academically resilient, Ana began to more positively identify with her ethnic and gender identities than before:

It's helped me be more proud of that identity. Like kind of taken it more into consideration and realizing like, "Yeah, I am Latina." and just being able to be proud of that as opposed to before when I didn't even realize it was something at all much less to be proud of.

Aleen, on the other hand, noted that her experience of academic resilience caused her to reconcile "conflicting" parts of her identity. Aleen shared that prior to college she liked to think of herself as a "modern American girl" rather than an a "traditional Mexican girl." She explained that she was very critical of her Mexican culture because of the culture's traditional gender norms. However, in overcoming the culture shock of college, Aleen realized that denying her Latina identity was not necessarily the answer. She explained, "Americans also have regressive, like very gendered attitudes. They also put women

down...it's not like a safe haven. Like, being whiter isn't gonna make me free alright. I need to be myself.”

Some participants who reported feeling more secure in their Latina identity after overcoming also described developing greater willingness to “show” their identity more openly and experiencing greater internalization of cultural values. For Jasmine, that meant speaking Spanish around her non-Latinx peers. Similarly, Lisette stated, “I've become like really into like my Hispanic heritage, the Latina like side of myself as I started doing better here. So like I started subscribing to more Spanish things.” Teresa, alternatively, spoke about endorsing the Latino cultural value of *familismo* to a greater extent after overcoming. She stated:

I feel like an even better, stronger Latina now because I have much more pride and family means the most to me now. I think after that whole situation, family meant a lot more to me cause I know that like I couldn't do it by myself. Yeah, it grew my family orientation ideals on me.

Participants reported not only greater pride in their Latina identity and culture after overcoming, but they also noted that their attitudes and beliefs about what it means to be Latina became more open and expansive. Many participants spoke about receiving messages within their families about how as Latinas they needed to “serve the man” and “keep the house in order.” Others shared stories about being taught at an early age how to cook and clean. Veronica even recalled once being told by her mother that she would need to choose between “being a mom or being a professional.” In short, the messages these participants received about being Latina were characterized by restriction and disadvantage.

However, it was evident during the interviews that participants' experiences of academic resilience enabled them to imagine new possibilities for themselves and for what it means to be Latina. This "shift" in perspective was poignantly described by Juanita:

So I feel that before, a Latina meant you have a lot of restrictions. Here's your contract. It says you have to like be passive. It says you have to be quiet. It says you can't really take charge or you have to do this and that and you have so many limitations to you. But I feel now it's like you can do whatever you want. You can be brave and strong and confident and sexy or anything that you want to be. Uh, yeah, I feel like perspectives have changed...The Latina I envision is powerful. She walks with much more confidence now.

Echoing a similar sentiment, Veronica stated:

Being a female in the Mexican culture doesn't just mean what it used to. Like it's not just about housekeeping. It's not just about doing certain jobs or certain things that are expected of you because that's what your family does. Now it's more of be a badass. Be what you want to...like being a Latina just means power...like you shouldn't take being a Latina or being a Mexican as something that means that you are less or something that means disadvantage or not having privilege.

Participants' statements such as the ones above clearly show that participants were able to internalize a new and empowering image of a Latina through their resilience experiences. This "new Latina" was described by participants as "hard working," outspoken, and self-sufficient. She, as noted by Lisette, was "more than a stereotype" and capable of "doing things that have never been done before." Interestingly, both Juanita and Teresa likened their new image of a Latina to "Rosie the Riveter." When asked about how these two figures were

related, Juanita commented on how both “had experience” and were “not passive or scared.”

Teresa had a similar interpretation and stated:

I feel like the Rosie Riveter...Like she doesn't let anyone like get her down. She doesn't let men get her down. She doesn't let any other race get her down. She doesn't let any other demographic get her down and she just fights through and I feel like I've kind of been doing that for the most part. So as long as I keep doing that, it'll be fine.

It should be noted that some participants were careful to clarify that they did not necessarily see Latina traditional gender norms and roles as “wrong” or “bad.” In fact, participants frequently identified female figures, primarily their mothers, as people they had deep admiration and respect for, describing them as “tough” and “strong willed.” For example, Perla commented on how she saw her mother and grandmother as resilient and successful, despite the fact that they had little to no education.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This qualitative study sought to better understand the relationship between identity and experiences of academic resilience among Latina college students by attending to the intersection of gender and ethnicity. To accomplish this, 15 Latina college students were interviewed about how their experiences of academic resilience have been shaped by their gender and ethnic identities. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) informed by a critical realist perspective was used to identify and analyze patterns of meaning across the data. Overall, the thematic analysis suggested that these Latina college students perceived themselves as different or less than due to their gender and ethnic identities. While this sense of otherness became another obstacle for them to overcome by creating feelings of self-doubt and isolation, Latinas in this study drew upon cultural resources, such as family and community support, and maintained a sense of greater purpose in order to persist and overcome. Moreover, in becoming academically resilient, these Latinas came to see themselves as stronger and more capable, experienced greater pride in their Latina identity, and developed a more expansive and empowering view of Latina identity.

It bears repeating that the conceptualization and data collection for this study was started and completed prior to 2020. As such, the themes capture the experiences of participants well before the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. While it is undeniable that the pandemic has transformed education and society, the results and the following discussion does not take into account the impact of the pandemic as the participants' experiences must be understood in relation to the time and context from which they were drawn. Although it is impossible to know the full impact of the pandemic and its lingering consequences on Latina college students and their academic resilience without further

investigation, it seems probable that the themes reported here would continue to be evident in participants' accounts if this study were to be replicated now. Research on the impact of the pandemic on Latinx college students is beginning to emerge, and it offers some preliminary support for this conclusion. For example, Morgan and Zetzer (2022) interviewed six first-generation, Latinx college students about the adversities they faced as a result of the pandemic, and found that their participants, like the ones in this study, also utilized cultural resources (i.e., family support, peer support) to overcome and were motivated to persevere in order to honor their parents' sacrifices and to help others.

Many of the findings from this study have been corroborated by extant literature. First, the accounts provided by participants were consistent with research that shows that Latina college students experience major challenges to education that necessitate them to be academically resilient (Gloria et al., 2005; Graff et al., 2013; Liou et al., 2021; Morgan Consoli et al., 2014). However, this is one of the few studies with Latina students that demonstrates that such obstacles, particularly experiences of discrimination and the cultural shock of college, evoke feelings of identity-based otherness that participants aligned with devaluation (Hashtpari et al., 2021; Havlik et al., 2020). For participants in this study, seeing themselves as different or less than interfered with their academics by creating or enhancing feelings of self-doubt and exclusion. To explain this, Pyne and Means (2013) note that the college environment, which represents a "borderland" (Anzaldúa et al., 2012) for many Latinx students, frequently denies the identities of underrepresented students causing them to feel that they do not belong.

While some researchers, like McGee (2016), have found that Latinx students respond to this devaluation by rejecting their identity (e.g., pretending not to speak Spanish)

or by passing as white, participants in this study leaned into their Latina identity and drew upon cultural resources to persist and succeed in school. Research has shown that ethnic identification increases among Latinx college students when they feel their ethnic group is negatively perceived (Glance et al., 2021). Additionally, Torres (2003) found that rather than assimilate, which is often expected of Latinx students (Ayala & Contreras, 2019), Latinx students develop a stronger sense of ethnic identity when they begin college if they came from predominately Latinx neighborhoods, which the majority of participants in this study did. It may be that these Latinx students are further along in terms of their ethnic identity development as a result of growing up in this sociocultural environment (Torres, 2003).

As for the cultural resources used by participants, this study furthers previous research indicating that Latina students possess cultural capital and strengths that they can utilize in their pursuit of educational attainment (Yosso, 2005). Specifically, in this study, family and community support were identified as two salient cultural resources that Latinas utilized in overcoming, which is consistent with previous research (Lasley Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Liou et al., 2021). For Latinx students as a whole, the positive impact of family support and the Latinx cultural value of *familismo* on their resilience and academic success is well documented (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Borrero, 2011; Cavazos et al., 2010a; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013; Ong et al., 2006; Sanchez & Morgan, 2022; Zalaquett, 2005). This study's findings also align with research that demonstrates that Latinx parents place a high value on education (Cavazos et al., 2010a; Zalaquett, 2005). They also support emerging literature that suggests that Latina mothers specifically are instrumental to the academic resilience of their children (Ballysingh, 2021; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004).

Studies have shown that social support is also vital to Latinx academic resilience (Lasley Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Orta et al., 2019; Sanchez & Morgan, 2022). In the present study, finding and building community with other Latinx students helped to reduce Latinas' feelings of otherness by providing them with a sense of belonging, validation, and safety. This is consistent with research by Lasley Barajas and Pierce (2001) that found that Latina college students were able to succeed in school and navigate feelings of difference by forming supportive relationships with other Latinas, who helped them maintain a positive view of their ethnic identity. One notable finding related to social support was that some participants in the current study felt a sense of community and support by taking Chicax Studies classes. This highlights how community can be created in unique ways, including taking a class in Chicax Studies. It also suggests that Latinx students can personally benefit from taking Chicax Studies courses (Marrun, 2018). Indeed, research on Chicax Studies courses has found that they have a positive effect on the ethnic and academic identities of Latinx students and provide them with motivation to persist and graduate (Hurtado, 2005; Marrun, 2018). Additionally, Nuñez (2011) found that Chicax Studies classes helped Latinx students manage their transition to college by helping them feel less isolated and by empowering them with a greater sense of pride in and awareness of their cultural heritage. Ayala and Contreras (2019) also note the empowering quality of these classes, explaining that they have the ability to increase the "cultural confidence" of Latinx students.

Participants were also asked about their motivation to overcome. It was found that participants were driven by a sense of purpose that transcended themselves. Specifically, they felt motivated to persist in the face of adversity in order to honor their parents' sacrifices and create change for their families and communities. This is consistent with

findings by Borrero (2011), Cavazos et al. (2010b), Easley et al. (2012), Sanchez and Morgan (2022), Vega (2016), and Yi and Ramos (2022). Thus, it appears that for Latina students, being academically resilient and successful in school represents more than an individual achievement. As Borrero (2011) asserts, it is a “shared success” or collective accomplishment that serves as a source of pride for the student, their family, and their community (Vega, 2016; Yi & Ramos, 2022). In addition to being motivated by family, participants reported that they were driven to prove stereotypes about Latinas wrong. This is a particularly interesting finding given that McGee (2016) found that high-achieving Black and Latinx college students gave up their goal of ending stereotypes while trying to maintain their academic success, believing that racism and discrimination were inevitable. Latinas in this study, however, used their knowledge of negative stereotypes about Latinxs and Latinx culture as a source of motivation to persist and succeed. Thus, this study contributes to the academic resilience literature by highlighting that having oppressed identities may contribute to one’s resilience (Patrón & Garcia, 2016). Additionally, this finding offers support for the concept of critical resilience (Campa, 2010; Morgan, 2023) as Latinas in this study viewed their efforts to break stereotypes as part of a larger purpose of resisting marginalization and uplifting their community.

Finally, this study makes a notable contribution to the literature by exploring in more depth the relationship between identity and academic resilience among Latina college students. In the current study, participants described how their gender and ethnic identities shaped the obstacles they faced and how they overcame them. At the same time, participants noted that their experiences of academic resilience led to changes in their identity. Specifically, participants stated that overcoming adversity to become successful in school

changed their beliefs about themselves in that they viewed themselves as stronger and more capable. They also described experiencing greater identification with and valuing of their Latina identity. Thus, it seemed that as their sense of self and identity strengthened through the resilience process, participants were able also to imagine new possibilities for themselves and what it means to be Latina. This is a significant finding as Ayala and Contreras (2019) assert, “Latina/o students who possess an empowered view of their racial and/or ethnic group, identifying and using the cultural capital circulating among group members, are more likely to persist and attain a college education” (p. 240). It also suggests the relationship between identity and academic resilience may be a reciprocal one in that both identity and academic resilience can impact the other.

To the author’s knowledge, no study to date has documented changes to identity as linked with academic resilience. Rather, previous research has identified having a sense of pride or strength in one’s identity as an important contributor Latinx students’ sense of hope (Yager-Elorriaga et al., 2014), persistence, and academic achievement (Castilllo et al, 2006; Devos & Torres, 2007; Havlik et al., 202). Additionally, Clauss-Ehlers et al. (2006) found that ethnic identity search (i.e., learning more about one’s ethnic identity) contributed to greater resilience among Latina undergraduate and graduate students. Similar to the current findings, Lasley Barajas and Pierce (2001) also found that academically successful Latina college students were able to work through experiences of discrimination and negative stereotyping by developing supportive relationships with other Latinas and by maintaining a positive view of their ethnic identity. While participants in this study and the study by Lasley Barajas and Pierce (2001) both leveraged their group membership as Latinas to persist and overcome, Lasley Barajas and Pierce (2001) did not report any

changes or positive growth to their participants' self-beliefs and identity as a result of persisting and overcoming. Rather, they reported that Latinas' positive identification with their ethnic identity was maintained. While the current finding (i.e., identity development as linked to academic resilience) is novel, it is in line with the concept of ethnic empowerment capital, which Ayala and Contreras (2019) have proposed adding to Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model. They define this new cultural capital as a sense of pride that Latinx students experience by being members of their racial and/or ethnic group that enables them to stay motivated, engaged, and connected to their identity. They also describe ethnic empowerment capital as "transformative," noting that it can "reinforce" Latinx students' racial and/or ethnic identities. More research is needed to further explore this finding, but it does suggest that identity and academic resilience are closely intertwined for Latina students.

Delimitations and Limitations

The results of this study should be considered within the context of its delimitations and limitations. While limitations refer to those constraints or variables that the researcher cannot control and may affect the outcome of the study, delimitations are self-imposed restrictions that limit the scope of the study (Miles, 2019). As is noted in Chapter 3, the focus of the study was restricted or delimited to self-identifying Latina students attending the same university. Therefore, the findings are not intended to be generalizable to all Latina college students. Rather, the intent is to provide a new and more nuanced understanding of the 15 participants' experiences of academic resilience in the context of their ethnic and gender identities.

It is worth noting, however, that the majority of the sample identified as Mexican or Mexican American. Only two participants identified their ethnic background as Salvadoran. Additionally, one participant identified as both Peruvian and Mexican and another identified as both Puerto Rican and Mexican. No other Latinx subgroups were endorsed by participants. Although the practice of treating Latinxs as a monolithic ethnic group is widespread throughout the literature, doing so may discount and disregard important differences among people from different Latin American regions and countries. Examples of these differences include migration histories and motives, socioeconomic background, racial heterogeneity, reception of host country, and political and religious affiliations. Such within-group differences may play an important role in Latinas' experiences of academic experiences and are worthy of further exploration. Additionally, the sample was solely composed of upper division undergraduates. This was likely the case as participants were recruited from classes that typically give priority to upper division students. It is also possible that students in their first or second year may not have identified as having overcome adversity to be successful in school, which was part of the criteria to be included in the study. Many of the participants in the study discussed having a difficult time personally and academically their first and second years of college. Thus, it may be that first and second year students self-selected out of the study because they were experiencing adversity at the time and did not see themselves as resilient.

Another delimitation of the study is related to the author's decision to exclusively focus on participants' ethnicity and gender in lieu of other dimensions of identity. The rationale behind this decision was detailed in Chapter 1. Additionally, scholars, such as Lasley Barajas and Pierce (2001) and Morales (2008b), have underscored the need for

further research into the role of gender in academic resilience processes among Latinx students. Nevertheless, other dimensions of identity certainly factored into participants' experiences of academic resilience. For example, some participants spoke about being low-income and first-generation college students while being Latina. This is not surprising as Latinx students as a whole are more likely than other student groups to be first-generation college students and to face financial hardships (PNPI, 2022). Nearly all participants in this study identified as first-generation college students and reported requiring financial assistance. This convergence of identities in participants' accounts directly speaks to intersectionality and the idea that people have multiple overlapping identities that they experience simultaneously and that shape their lived experiences, including experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). However, due to the delimitations of this study and to focus in on understanding in depth a piece of the participants' identities, the author only coded responses within the context of the participants' ethnic and gender identities, which is reflected in the final results.

One possible limitation of this study was that not all participants were asked what they felt it meant to be of their ethnicity and gender (i.e., Latinx and a woman) as this was not included in the interview protocol. Consequently, their ideas and beliefs about what it means to be Latina were not fully explored or captured. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, only some participants were directly asked about this when such questioning seemed relevant to what the participant was sharing. Of those participants who were asked, there was no coherent theme that ran across their responses. Rather, participants generally seemed confused by this line of questioning and had difficulty articulating their thoughts. For example, one participant stated that she did not know how to answer the question as she

had never thought about it before. Another participant spoke about her sexual orientation rather than her gender identity. Still, another talked about her “essence” as a woman and her reproductive abilities. Thus, it may be that such questions were too abstract for participants to grasp and provide meaningful responses. Additionally, to the author’s knowledge, there have not been any studies that have specifically examined Latina college students’ perceptions of what it means to be Latinx and a woman and how that can affect their experiences. Future exploration is needed to gain a better understanding of what it means to be Latina.

Implications

Education

The findings of this study provide valuable insights about Latina students, their educational experiences, and resilience that can be used to inform education and clinical practice. From a higher education standpoint, the findings underscore the need for colleges and universities to focus on alleviating Latina students’ feelings of otherness. Despite efforts to create more inclusive campus climates (U.S. Department of Education et al., 2016), participants’ accounts are evidence that discrimination and microaggressions are still common occurrences for Latina college students, and that they have a deleterious effect on their sense of belonging, academic engagement and motivation, sense of self, and mental health. This is of great concern as previous research has identified sense of belonging (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005), motivation (Cavazos et al., 2010a; Reynolds et al., 2010; Vega, 2016), and self-efficacy (Cavazos et al., 2010a; Graff et al., 2013; Morales, 2008) as important to the academic success and resilience of Latinx students. Furthermore, a positive campus climate and commitment to diversity is related to Latinx students’ ability to be

successful in college (Ancis et al., 2000; Reynolds et al., 2010) and predicts their overall satisfaction toward their institution (Lin et al., 2019).

Thus, in order to limit and ideally prevent Latina students from feeling othered, it is essential that colleges and universities continue to be proactive in implementing policies that advance diversity and inclusion on their campuses. Given that participants identified university staff and faculty as perpetrators of microaggressions, it seems critical for staff and faculty to receive comprehensive and ongoing training to increase their cultural competence (Havlik et al., 2020). Such training should include the use of an intersectional lens (Havlik et al., 2020) and frame culture and identity as sources of resilience. Additionally, it would be fruitful for staff and faculty to learn about the importance of engaging families and building relationships with Latina students as this study and others have highlighted the importance of family to Latina student success and demonstrated that Latinas primarily seek support from people they know and trust (Torres & Hernandez, 2007).

On a broader institutional level, the current findings also offer support for the following practices as part of diversity and inclusion initiatives on college campuses: (a) the hiring and retaining of diverse faculty and staff and (b) developing and supporting culturally relevant curriculum and programming. As noted in the findings, participants' sense of otherness was at times related to not seeing themselves reflected in the faculty and staff. This was not surprising as only 3% of full-time faculty are Latina (NCES, 2022a). In general, faculty of color are significantly underrepresented when compared to the national demographic breakdown and are overrepresented as adjunct and assistant professors (Williams, 2019). Research on faculty diversity has indicated that having more faculty of color increases the sense of belonging, recruitment, and retention of students of color

(Williams 2019). For Latinx students specifically, it has been suggested that Latinx faculty as well as other faculty of color may be more likely to utilize curricula and pedagogy that is culturally relevant to Latinx students (U.S. Department of Education et al., 2016).

Researchers have also underscored the importance of having more Latinx faculty to improving educational attainment among Latinx students (Nuñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012; U.S. Department of Education et al., 2016). Such faculty may serve as important role models and mentors for Latinx students as participants in this study commented that they perceive white faculty and staff as not understanding of their background or cultural concerns. It was also striking that participants in this study did not mention any mentors as part of their academic resilience stories since mentorship has been identified as facilitative to Latinx student success in higher education (Arana et al., 2011; Medina & Posadas, 2012; Morales, 2008b; Sanchez & Morgan, 2022).

In terms of curricula and programming, the findings highlight the need for colleges and universities to continue to support and advance ethnic studies and diversity-based courses. This is especially critical now given recent backlash and legislative efforts against the teaching of diversity and diversity-related curriculum (Kite & Clark, 2022). Despite negative scrutiny, ethnic studies and diversity-based courses are an essential part of creating an inclusive campus environment as they have been shown to reduce bias and have positive academic and psychological outcomes (Kite & Clark, 2022; Williams, 2019). Thankfully, it has become common for higher education institutions to require students to take at least one course related to diversity (Williams, 2019). For Latina students, the findings suggest that it may be beneficial for them to take a Chicana Studies class, particularly during their first year in college. Not only did these classes provide participants with a sense of

community, but they also seemed to be especially helpful for those participants who reported experiencing culture shock upon moving to campus (Nuñez, 2011). For those institutions that also offer bridge programs that help Latinx students make the transition to college, the findings support integrating culturally relevant content and practices that engage families, enhance students' social connections, and promote positive identity development for Latinx students. Moreover, these programs as well as other outreach efforts, should be year-round and made available to Latinx students throughout their tenure given that some participants' experiences of adversity were chronic and ongoing. Although the aforementioned recommendations are important action steps that can advance the academic resilience of Latinx students, there is much more that can be done institutionally. Contreras (2019) and Garcia et al. (2019) provide additional practical recommendations on how higher education institutions can better "serve" and "respond" to the needs of Latinx students.

Clinical Practice

In terms of clinical implications, the findings of this study illuminate ways university counseling centers and practitioners can support Latina college students' academic resilience. Underutilization of mental health services among Latinx people, including Latinx college students, is well documented in the literature (Menendez et al., 2020; Sampe et al., 2021). Stigma and cultural beliefs about mental health have been identified as barriers to Latinx college students utilizing mental health services on campus (Menendez et al., 2020). For Latina college students specifically, it has also been suggested that they have less favorable views of professional counseling than their male counterparts due to their strong and positive group identification, which leads them to favor culturally congruent sources of support such as family and friends over professional help when dealing with personal and

psychological problems (Chiang et al., 2004). The research on whether Latinas or Latinos have more positive views of counseling are mixed, however (Mendoza et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the resilience stories shared by participants suggest that Latina students could benefit from greater support, outreach, and advocacy from university counseling centers and practitioners.

Indeed, it is important to note that while participants overcame many obstacles and are resilient, it does not necessarily mean that they have healed from their past wounds. It was not uncommon for participants to cry while recounting their difficult experiences during the interview. One participant admitted afterwards that she still had many unprocessed emotions from the hardships she had faced and could benefit from going to therapy. Thus, despite underutilization, therapy may serve as a meaningful opportunity for Latina students to reflect on their experiences and acknowledge their resilience. In fact, several participants commented that they found the interview experience “cathartic” as it was the first time that they had talked through and made sense of all that they had overcome and achieved.

Meaning-making as a therapeutic change mechanism is found across various theoretical orientations and therapy approaches (e.g., art therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, emotion-focused therapy, narrative therapy). Additionally, previous research has documented meaning-making as a method or source of resilience for Latinx college students (Morgan & Zetzer, 2022; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013; Morgan Consoli et al., 2018). Wickenden (2011) also notes, “Being able to tell one's own story is an important part of selfhood and is potentially empowering.” Thus, practitioners working with Latina college students are encouraged to help these students develop their own meaning and narrative around their academic resilience. This could include helping students (a) name the

challenges that they have faced in order to be successful in school, (b) identify what has helped them overcome (e.g., personal traits, cultural values, family and community support), and (c) describe their motivation in pursuing higher education (Cavazos et al., 2010b).

Adames et al. (2018) and Pérez-Rojas et al. (2023) also recommend that practitioners use an intersectional approach and work with Latinx students in developing awareness and insight into how their multiple identities intersect with institutional and structural factors to shape their educational experiences and coping. In guiding students to think about and make sense of their academic resilience and identities, students may develop a stronger sense of self and purpose that will help them continue to persevere (Cavazos et al., 2010a).

Outside of the therapy room, university counseling centers and practitioners are encouraged to be proactive and consistent in their efforts to connect with Latina students. This could include reaching out and providing workshops on relevant topics to Latina student groups and sororities, having a presence at campus social and cultural events for Latinx students, and providing mental health services in spaces where Latinx students are more likely to visit (e.g., student resource center, residence halls). By making these efforts, Latinx students will become more aware of counseling resources and familiar with counseling center staff, which may help to reduce stigma and increase trust among these students (Sampe et al, 2021). However, considering that participants in this study sought out support from peers and community groups, Latina students may be more inclined to access mental health services by joining identity-based therapy groups or meeting with a trained mental health peer. University counseling centers could have these mental health peers provide outreach and lead psychoeducational presentations on topics that are relevant to Latinx students and their needs (e.g., navigating cultural differences, managing family

stress, promoting mental wellness in the context of microaggressions) (Sampe et al., 2021). Finally, participants noted the lack of Latinx representation among professors while underscoring the importance of receiving support from people that understand their cultural experiences and concerns. As such, it may be helpful to Latina college students that university counseling centers have staff, particularly those providing mental health treatment, that reflect their identities and background (Hernandez, 2000; Medina & Posada, 2012).

Future Directions

The current study and its findings provide a new foundation from which to build upon and expand our understanding of Latinas and their academic resilience. While qualitative methods are best suited to explore complex phenomena such as academic resilience, it would be informative for future research to incorporate quantitative methods to better understand the specific relationships between academic resilience, ethnic identity, and gender as well as to attend to issues of generalizability. Specifically, quantitative research could further examine how academic resilience is related to ethnic identity among Latinas. Although there is some evidence of positive effects of ethnic identity on the academic achievement (Fuligni et al., 2005; Havlik et al., 2020; Ong et al., 2006; Piña Watson et al., 2018) and general resilience (Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013) of Latinx students, no study thus far has investigated the impact of academic resilience on ethnic identity for any ethnic group or gender. In light of the current findings, it would be interesting, for example, to assess whether academic resilience leads to increased ethnic pride, a facet of ethnic identity, among Latinas. The identity development described by participants in this study would suggest that it does. Results from this study also suggest that future research should examine

the relationship between academic resilience and other cultural resources like the Latinx cultural value of *familismo*. Although past studies have documented that *familismo* is positively associated with sense of school belonging (Cupito et al., 2015) and is a strong predictor of general resilience among Latinx students (Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013), more research on how *familismo* and, more broadly, family support, contribute to the academic resilience of Latina students is needed if effective and culturally responsive interventions are to be developed.

In addition to using quantitative methods, future research on academic resilience could utilize a longitudinal study design. Given that the majority of participants expressed a desire to continue their education and pursue graduate school, it seems important that researchers examine academic resilience through longitudinal studies. Morales (2008a) makes a case for the use of longitudinal studies in examining academic resilience as he points out that resilience occurs over time. Longitudinal research can also help researchers further explore the changes in identity that were observed in the current study. For example, participants could be interviewed once every year during their college careers to track how their identity evolves as they face adversities and work to overcome them. Such an approach could also be useful in identifying what distinguishes those students who remain resilient from those who do not.

As previously mentioned, other dimensions of participants' identities could be studied further and include first-generation college student status and socioeconomic status as categories of analysis. Qualitative studies by Pyne and Means (2013) as well as Michel & Durdella (2019) on first-generation, low-income Latinx students and their adjustment to college provide useful starting points for future inquiry. Another aspect of identity in need of

further exploration is that of skin color or tone (colorism) and its impact on students' experiences of academic resilience. Within participants' accounts of otherness, there seemed to be heightened awareness around looking visibly different (e.g., "no one looked like me") from other students. Although many participants did not expound on the specific physical differences that separated them from their peers, they often spoke about looking different from white students. Several participants also referred to themselves as "brown" and two participants remarked about "being the darkest person in the room." Research on the impact of skin color within the Latinx community is scarce, but it suggests that darker skin color is associated with more experiences of discrimination and poorer psychological outcomes (Adames et al., 2016; Fuentes et al., 2021). Additionally, calls have been made for greater consideration of the role of colorism in the educational experiences of Latinx students as Latinx college students have reported experiencing microaggressions related to their skin color (Ayala & Young, 2022; McGee, 2016).

Finally, future studies could also include the male voice and attend to the academic resilience experiences of Latino males (Matos, 2015). Latino males are not only "vanishing" from the higher education pipeline in the U.S., but they are also an understudied group, especially from a strengths-based framework (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). No previous study has specifically explored the impact of ethnicity and gender on the academic resilience of college Latino males. However, Lasley Barajas and Pierce (2001) did examine the ways in which race and gender shape Latinx students' paths to success in college and found "gendered strategies for success" (p. 874). Examining if and how academic resilience is gendered can inform interventions targeted at improving both Latino and Latina academic achievement and closing the gender gap in educational attainment.

Conclusion

Latinx student success is critical to the future of the U.S. While Latinx students have made significant strides in education over the last 30 years, these students continue to face barriers and inequities that threaten their progress. Academic resilience represents a promising area of research that can inform educational policy and clinical practice to help Latinx students persevere and be successful in school. While the literature on academic resilience has expanded, our understanding of it among Latinx college students is still limited, particularly in regard to the role of identity. This study examined the academic resilience experiences of a group of Latina college students and highlighted how using an intersectional lens can enhance and deepen our understanding of Latinas' school experiences as well as their personal and cultural strengths. The findings of this study support past research that links identity and academic resilience. Specifically, this study demonstrated that the participants utilized their identity as Latinas to persist and overcome, and in doing so, came to see themselves and Latinas as strong and "powerful." Thus, let this study be a call to action to help Latinas and other Latinxs tap into their power to transform themselves, their communities, and society.

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Appendix A

Pseudonym	Age	Country of origin	Parents' country of origin	Home County	Student Classification	Major	Minor	GPA
Juanita	21	Mexico	Mexico, Puerto Rico	San Diego	Junior	Sociology	Applied Psychology, Education Studies	3.43
Beatriz	21	US	Mexico	Alameda	Junior	Chicana/o Studies, Sociology	None	3.00
Maria	20	US	Mexico	San Diego	Junior	Chicana/o Studies, Sociology	Applied Psychology	3.66
Lisette	20	US	Mexico	San Bernardino	Junior	Mathematical Science	Applied Psychology	2.25
Teresa	21	US	Mexico	Los Angeles	Senior	Latin American Studies, Sociology	Applied Psychology	2.73
Angelica	20	Mexico	Mexico	Alameda	Junior	Psychology	Applied Psychology, Italian	2.60
Aleen	26	US	Mexico	Los Angeles	Junior	Sociology	Applied Psychology	3.20
Joselyn	21	US	Mexico, Peru	Los Angeles	Junior	Psychology	Applied Psychology	3.76
Marisol	20	Mexico	Mexico	Los Angeles	Junior	Mathematical Science	None	3.35
Veronica	20	US	El Salvador	Los Angeles	Junior	Psychology	Applied Psychology	3.02
Raquel	20	US	Mexico	Santa Clara	Junior	Psychology	Applied Psychology, Education Studies	3.30
Elma	21	US	El Salvador	Los Angeles	Senior	Psychology	Applied Psychology	3.10
Jasmin	23	US	Mexico	Los Angeles	Senior	History of Art, Sociology	None	3.58
Perla	21	US	Mexico	Sacramento	Junior	Biopsychology	None	3.30
Ana	20	US	Mexico	Los Angeles	Junior	Global Studies, Sociology	None	3.24

Appendix A. Participant descriptions

Appendix B

Screening Form

Instructions: In order to participate in the current study, participants must meet certain criteria. Please respond to all of the following questions to determine if you are eligible to participate in the study.

Name:

1. **Are you 18 years or older?** Yes No
2. **Do you identify as Latina or Latino?** Latina Latino Other: _____
3. **Are you currently enrolled at UCSB as an undergraduate?** Yes No
4. **Have you experienced one or more challenges/disadvantages that you believe put you at risk for underachievement or failure in school?** Yes No
5. **Do you believe that you overcame (or are overcoming) this challenge/disadvantage and have succeeded in school?** Yes No

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: Please complete the following questionnaire. All questions are optional and voluntary and may be skipped. Thank you.

1. **Name:** _____
2. **Gender:** _____
3. **Sex:** _____
4. **Age:** _____
5. **Race:** _____
6. **Ethnicity:** _____
7. **Sexual orientation:** _____
8. **Religion or spiritual affiliation:** _____
9. **Country of birth:** _____
10. **Estimate of family's annual income:** _____
11. **How many people are supported by that income?** _____
12. **Do you receive financial aid?** Yes No
13. **Do you currently work?** Yes No
 - a. **If yes, what is your occupation?** _____
 - b. **If yes, how many hours per week do you work?** _____
14. **Do you have any disabilities?** Yes No
 - a. **If yes, what type of disability is it?** Physical Developmental
Psychological Learning
Other: _____
15. **What year did you start UCSB?** _____
16. **What year do you anticipate graduating?** _____

17. Are you a first-generation college student? Yes No

18. Are you a transfer student? Yes No

a. If yes, which school did you previously attend? _____

b. If yes, how many years were you enrolled at this school? _____

19. What is your major? _____

20. What is your minor? _____

21. Current GPA: _____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Thank you for completing the demographic questionnaire. I am now going to ask you a series of questions about your experience of overcoming challenges and your different identities. My goal is to get a clear and full picture of your experiences so I may also ask you to expand on some of your answers. Once again, if there are questions that you would prefer to not answer, you can pass at any time. Are you ready to begin?

Part of the criteria for being in this study is that you see yourself as being successful in school. Can you please explain what succeeding in school means to you?

Prompt: How have you been successful?

Prompt: How, if at all, has your ethnicity and gender informed your ideas about success?

Prompt: How, if at all, has your ethnicity and gender affected your ability to succeed?

You indicated that you have faced a challenge or disadvantage that put at risk for underachievement or failure in school. What was that challenge or challenges?

Prompt: How did this challenge put you at risk?

Prompt: Why do you think you have experienced this challenge?

Prompt: How, if at all, has ethnicity and gender played into your experience of this challenge?

How did you overcome this challenge?

Prompt: What did you specifically do to overcome this challenge?

Prompt: How did your ethnicity and gender affect your response to this challenge?

What helped you overcome this challenge?

Prompt: What role did people in your life play while you faced this challenge?

Prompt: How has your ethnicity and gender helped or hurt you while trying to overcome this challenge.

What motivated you to work through this challenge?

Prompt: How, if at all, have your motivations been shaped by ethnicity and gender?

Prompt: As a Latina, why is succeeding in school important to you?

What does it mean to overcome this challenge?

Prompt: What does it mean to overcome this challenge as a Latina?

Prompt: How, if at all, has facing this challenge and overcoming it changed what it means to you to be a Latina?

Is there anything about your struggles, accomplishments, and identities that I have not asked you about but feel that it is important for me to know?