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*Igualita que su madre*: A Study on the Educational Journey of First-Generation Latina College  
Graduates and the Support Roles of Their Immigrant Mothers

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Elisa Pérez

2018

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

*Igualita que su madre: A Study on the Educational Journey of First-Generation Latina College Graduates and the Support Roles of Their Immigrant Mothers*

by

Elisa Pérez

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Robert Cooper, Chair

This qualitative study examined the academic relationship between first-generation Latina college graduates and their immigrant mothers. Research shows that Latinas are the fastest growing ethnic minority in the country, and by 2060 will account for nearly a third of the total female population in the United States (Gandara, 2015). Although the literature suggests that Latinas are outperforming Latinos academically (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011), Latinas still require educational support in order to succeed during their educational trajectories (Beltrán & NCLR, 2011). Using Chicana/Latina feminist theory (Villenas, Godinez, Bernal, & Elenes, 2006), this study explored how first-generation Latina college graduates viewed their educational journey and how their immigrant mothers supported them throughout the process. Specifically, this study examined the individual stories of both the mothers and their daughters using *pláticas* (friendly and relaxed conversations). The research design consisted of two semi-structured interviews with each individual participant.

Findings were then organized around five themes: (a) Stories of Struggle, (b) Unconditional Support, (c) Additional Academic Support Outside of the Family, (d) College Persistence, and (e) They Just Don't Get It. The findings of the study revealed that although the immigrant mothers in this study lacked a formal education, they still did what they physically could to support their daughters and their academic careers. In addition, the data also showed that the first-generation Latina college graduates in this study understood their mothers could not help them when it came to completing math homework, writing an essay, or applying to college; so, they sought outside support to fill this void. All the college graduates in the study claimed that they had additional help from either mentors, teachers, or outside pre-college programs throughout middle school or high school. According to the college graduates, this outside support was crucial in understanding the significance of applying to and going to college. For the first-generation Latina students in this study, their concern was not lacking the motivation to go to college, their problem was not having the requisite resources, exposure, and support. Although their mothers wanted their daughters to go to college, they did not have the knowledge or expertise to help them do so. The findings from this study suggest that schools, communities, and families need to develop meaningful and purposeful partnerships to better support first-generation Latinas. Recommendations for practice consist of schools and communities supporting first-generation Latina students through: parental engagement, providing access to mentors and pre-college program opportunities, and developing a systemic approach in easing the transition from high school to college.

*Keywords:* Latinas, immigrants, first-generation, higher education, mothers and daughters, Hispanic, and Chicana.

The dissertation of Elisa Pérez is approved.

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2018

## DEDICATION

*Para la inspiración de este estudio, mi propia mamá, Maricela Pérez, quien me ha enseñado más de lo que yo he aprendido en una clase. Le agradezco mamá por siempre apoyarme y mis locuras. Le pido a Dios que algún día pueda ser mitad de la mujer que es usted y ser capaz de amar y apoyar a mis hijos de la misma manera en que usted me ha ayudado durante toda mi vida. Sin usted, yo no sería nadie. Tengo fe que algún día pueda ser igualita que mi madre.*

To the inspiration of this study, my own mom, Maricela Pérez, who has taught me more than I have ever learned in a classroom. I thank you mom for always supporting me and my crazy ideas. I ask God that I can one day I can be half the woman you are and be able to love and support my children the same way you have helped me my entire life. Without you I would be no one. I have faith that one day I will be just like my mother.

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since day one, this dissertation partially belongs to you as well. I thank you for your constant reassurance, kindness, and most of all patience. I appreciate your love, support, and encouragement as we travel this journey together. I am the luckiest person in the world to have someone like you by my side.

Most importantly, I would also like to thank the mothers and daughters who were mentioned throughout this dissertation. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your lives, and trusting me to share your stories. I will always remember you.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Project

This study investigated the academic relationship between first-generation college bound Latinas and their immigrant mothers.<sup>1</sup> Although recent literature suggests that Latinas are outperforming Latinos academically (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011), Latinas still require educational support in order to succeed academically (Beltrán & National Council of La Raza [NCLR], 2011). This study focused on first-generation college-bound Latinas and the influence their mothers had on their educational aspirations. Specifically, this study investigated the various ways Latinas who had recently graduated from college reported how their mothers helped them thrive academically, not just emotionally. The results of this study are being used to help community and educational leaders to explore how K-12 schools, districts, and communities can help mothers and female guardians support first-generation Latinas who are trying to attain a higher education.

### Background of the Problem

Latinas in the United States currently make up 20% of the female population, and by 2060 will compose one third of our total female population (Gandara, 2015). Although Latinas are outperforming Latinos academically (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011), they are still earning less money than their Latino counterparts in the labor market (Gandara, 2015). In addition, Latinas have some of the lowest high school graduation rates and college completion rates among all women (Gandara, 2015; Lapayese, 2013; Schwartz, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> In this study the term *first-generation* is used for students who are the first in their family to go to college. In addition, the term *immigrant* is used to describe individuals who are in the U.S. for long-term settlement.

Latinas also face numerous social stresses and are more likely to be living in poverty and be single-mothers when compared to their White counterparts. Earning less than \$24,000 a year, many Latino/a families are forced to focus on their daily struggles versus the educational attainment of their children (Gandara, 2015; Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Compared to all major ethnic groups, Latino/a children are also six times less likely to attend preschool (Zarate, 2007). In 2009, only 48% of Latino/a children attended preschool, compared to 70% of White and 69% of Black children (Beltrán & NCLR, 2011). Young Latinos/as are also more likely to experience discrimination both inside and outside of a school setting when compared to their White counterparts; many Latino/a students have either personally experienced or have witnessed someone else experience discrimination. When Latinos/as are faced with discrimination, studies show there is a decrease in their academic motivation and overall educational aspirations (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, Bámaca, & Zeiders, 2009). The low levels of college attainment within the Latino/a community requires a further exploration of available resources to help them succeed academically (Fry, 2002).

### **Existing Interventions**

Although Latino/a students in the United States are more likely to attend segregated schools when compared to other major ethnic groups (Orfield & Lee, n.d.), several programs have been created to help Latinos/as who want to pursue a higher education. These programs include Federal TRIO Programs, which focus on helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds acquire a higher education while collaborating with parents and families (National PTA, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a).

In addition to educational programs based in schools that support many Latino/a students and families, the federal government has also created the White House Initiative on Educational

Excellence for Hispanics through the U.S. Department of Education. This initiative focuses on expanding educational opportunities and improving educational outcomes for Latinos/as of all ages (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.b).

In 2015, the White House Initiative researched the current condition of Hispanic women and girls to understand what type of support would enhance their education. The report revealed the disproportionate under-education and poverty of Latinos/as. It also stressed how important it is to specifically focus on Latinas because a mother's education predicts her child's education. The study showed that Latinas were the "lynchpin of the next generation," emphasizing that Latinas should acquire a higher education because "the future and economic well-being" of many states depend on the future leadership and expertise of Latinas in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.b, p. 6 ).

In response to current educational challenges facing Latinas, programs work to provide training and support to students and their mothers. For example, the Mother-Daughter Program, directed by Josefina Tinajero and run through the University of Texas El Paso (UTEP), acknowledges the chronic underachievement of Latinas in the United States. This program works to create a more equitable representation of Latinas in both higher education and the workplace. The program empowers both Latina students and their mothers to have higher expectations for themselves through goal-setting, building self-esteem, and increasing parental commitment. Both mothers and daughters are required to commit to the program for 1 year and meet at UTEP one Saturday a month for academic workshops, activities, and fieldtrips. At the end of the program both mothers and daughters are awarded completion certificates and are thereafter invited to attend a yearly leadership conference until the daughter's first year of college (The University of Texas at El Paso, n.d.).



The Mother-Daughter Program at UTEP is one-of-a-kind in the nation. It provides Latina mothers with the necessary academic information to help their daughters receive an education that prepares them for college and beyond. Although other programs in the United States help Latino/a students acquire a higher education, none focus solely on Latinas like the Mother-Daughter Program at UTEP. In order to further help Latinas thrive academically, policymakers and school districts need to investigate how parent involvement in academics, particularly that of mothers, can help students be prepared for college.

### **Studying Parental Involvement from the Student Perspective**

As policymakers and schools try to improve the educational outcomes for Latino/a students, parental involvement continues to play a significant role in the educational experience of their children (Espinosa, 1995; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Jeynes, 2016; Reynolds, Crea, Medina, Degnan, & McRoy, 2015; Zarate, 2007). Gandara's (1982) seminal study of high-achieving women paved the way for parental involvement research within the Latino/a community. Gandara studied the various factors that contributed to the educational success of seventeen Mexican-American women. Her results showed that one similar key factor among all the women she studied was the support the mothers gave their high-achieving daughters. In this study, Latina students noted that although their mothers lacked a formal education they were more likely than their fathers to encourage them to acquire a higher education and seek a non-traditional role in life. Although no specific details were recorded as to how exactly the mothers intervened in their daughter's academics, Gandara found that Latina mothers have the capacity to affect their daughter's education positively. However, more research would need to be conducted to further explore precisely how.

Using the theory of resiliency and social capital, Ceja (2004) further explored Gandara's (1982) research on Latino/a academic parenting by also studying the role of parents in their daughters' quest to obtain a higher education. Ceja found that Latina students felt their parents valued acquiring an education, despite not having a formal education themselves. In addition, Ceja found that because many low-income minority parents do not have a formal education, they had to rely on their economic, social, and occupational struggles to show their daughters why they need a higher education. In the study, parents stressed the significance of doing well in school by sharing their personal struggles and poor working conditions with their daughters. As in Gandara's (1995) study, Ceja's study also describes how parents' storytelling and the indirect lived experiences helped shape their daughters' higher educational aspirations. These young Latina students found meaning in their parents' lived experiences even though their parents lacked a formal education.

The research behind Latino/a parent involvement shows that the more active parents are in their child's schooling, the more successful their child has the potential to be (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Jeynes, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the available research is limited when it comes to exclusively studying how Latina mothers can specifically help their academically high-achieving daughters. Although some research shows Latino/a parents are influential in their child's academic attainment, the literature does not detail what Latina mothers do or say to help their daughters thrive academically.

My study adds to the current research on Latino/a parent involvement because it explores how Latina mothers support their college-bound daughters while in elementary, middle school, and high school. This study uses narratives from first-generation Latina college graduates and details how their mothers helped them succeed while in school. The results of this study will

benefit K-12 schools, districts, and communities by sharing the stories of these participants with other families and community members who also wish to support first-generation Latinas obtain a higher education.

**Research questions.** This study investigated the following research questions:

1. How do first-generation Latina college graduates understand their educational journey and academic achievements? How do their immigrant mothers understand their daughter's educational journey and academic achievements? How, if at all, do these understandings differ?
2. Based on their own experiences what advice, suggestions, or ideas can first-generation Latina college graduates and their immigrant mothers provide to community and educational leaders to strengthen the educational trajectories of first-generation Latinas and their families?

**Site.** The site for this study was the El Monte Union High School District, located in the San Gabriel Valley 12 miles east of Downtown Los Angeles with a Latino/a population of over 70% (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). With such a high population of Latinos/as, this school district provided a substantial pool of participants to interview.

**Research design and methods.** A qualitative design was deemed appropriate because I sought to understand how Latina college graduates made sense of their academic lives. I wanted to make meaning of how first-generation Latinas interpreted their mothers' actions and influenced their educational journeys from their own perspective. This study used a narrative approach because its intention was to provide an in depth analysis on how mother and daughter interactions have the potential to influence academic decisions (Maxwell, 2013). Interviews were qualitative in nature, providing a story-oriented and chronological explanation of how Latina

mothers helped their daughters academically over time (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). This study used interviews that were approached as *pláticas* (friendly and relaxed conversations) to gather the individual narratives of first-generation Latina college graduates to interpret and make meaning of the academic relationships they have with their immigrant mothers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A total of two semi-structured *pláticas* were conducted per person with pre-selected El Monte Union High School graduates who had recently graduated from a 4-year university and their mothers. All college graduate participants were Latinas from the El Monte and South El Monte communities who were recruited through social media, email, telephone, and student recommendations. The criteria for student selection were as follows:

1. First-generation Latina who had graduated from one of the six high schools in the El Monte Union High School District.
2. Recently graduated (within 5 years) from a 4-year college/university.
3. Have a mother, or female guardian, who self-identifies as Latina and agrees to participate in the study and also be interviewed.

The selected students and their mothers were interviewed with questions that reflected this study's research questions. The goal of the one-to-one *pláticas* with the Latina college graduates was to understand what type of academic support their mothers provided their daughters during their quest to obtain a higher education. The additional and separate *pláticas* with the mothers served to add to and clarify what their daughters had expressed. The interview questions asked the Latina college graduates to describe how their mothers helped them academically, regardless of their own educational level, as well as what other factors helped them during their educational journeys. The interview questions for the mothers were similar in regard to their role as mothers

and the academic support they provided their daughters. As an employee within the El Monte Union High School District, I had access to several graduates who had recently graduated from a 4-year university. I contacted these students through social media and interviewed them via Google Hangouts and in person for their first in-depth *plática* depending on their availability. The second follow-up *plática* was done over the phone.

### **Significance of the Research**

Studies show that although many Latino/a immigrants are not educated in their home countries, they want their children to be educated and acquire a higher education in the United States (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004; Clayton, Garcia, Underwood, McEndree, & Shepherd, 1993; Gaetano, 2007; Gandara, 1995; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012). Parents play a pivotal role in the education of their children; Clayton et al. (1993) claimed that, when compared to other ethnic groups, Latino/a parents have the greatest parental influence over the educational aspirations of their children. Thus, it is important to study how mothers, fathers, siblings, teachers, schools, and communities can help Latinas intellectually, not just emotionally. In this study, Latina mothers try to make sure their daughters are prepared educationally to acquire a college degree and eventually lead our communities. As the research shows, fewer factors predict a child's educational outcome than the education of his or her mother (Davis-Kean, 2005; Korupp, Ganzeboom, & Lippe, 2002; Mullen, Goyette, & Soares, 2003). Accordingly, it is important to focus on the educational attainment of the fastest growing population, Latinas, to make sure they and their future children are prepared to lead. The outcome of this study is being used to facilitate parent workshops so families can help their developing daughters acquire a higher education and close the achievement gap.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

With the rapid growth of Latinos/as in the United States and their underperformance in education, this literature review investigated research on the academic relationship between high-achieving Latinas and their mothers. This review first highlights how Chicana/Latina feminist theory helps explain key challenges and successes in the educational journey of academically high-achieving Latinas. Chicana/Latina feminist theory sheds light on how, despite challenges, high-achieving Latinas in education can still draw on cultural capital and persevere to meet their academic goals. This literature review is divided into six sections: (a) Chicana/Latina feminist theory, (b) Latino/a underachievement in the United States, (c) Latino/a parent engagement, (d) the educational experience of Latina students, (e) Latina mothers' academic influence, and (f) Latino/a storytelling.

### **Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory**

Chicana/Latina feminist theory helps explain how young Latinas are often successful because of their resistance methods, traditions, skills, and cultural capital. Villenas, Godinez, Bernal, and Elenes (2006) relied on Chicana/Latina feminist theory to explain how mainstream institutions can incorporate the strengths and unique experiences of Latinas to uplift the Chicano/Latino community. P. Sánchez (2009) claimed that the lived experiences of Chicana scholars aligns with Chicana/Latina feminist theory because their knowledge produces *conocimientos*, or homemade theory. This assertion aligns with Villenas et al., who explained that the lived experiences and everyday practices of Latinos/as should be considered theory. Anzaldúa (1990) claimed that people of color have oftentimes been excluded from theory, but it is now time to transform the “theorizing space” to include “our own approaches and

methodologies” (p. xxv). For Anzaldúa, theory is a lived experience that can be used as a tool if studied properly to overcome barriers.

Anzaludúa’s (1987) theoretical framework on the *mestiza consciousness* has served as a foundation for the development of Chicana/Latina feminist theory. In her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa explains how *mestizas*—women of mixed ancestry— are trapped between two worlds while straddling cultures, races, languages, nations, and spiritualities. *Mestizas* must embrace their roots—Indian, Mexican, Anglo, Chicana, and even Lesbian— and fight against the obstacles that stand in their way. This new awakening and breaking down of dualisms known as the *mestiza consciousness* will allow Latinas and Chicanas to support each other in changing the sexist and racist elements within their culture.

Anzaldúa (1987) and other feminist scholars claim that Chicanas/Latinas face triple oppressions—imperialism, sexism, and racism—and should collaborate with others to defend themselves against their oppressors (García, 1997). Villenas (2006) expanded further on this notion of collaboration by explaining that Chicanas/Latinas must assert their lived knowledge and the stories of their kin, primarily their mothers, to build solidarity across all Latina groups. She explained that the theory behind Chicana/Latina feminist thought must be put to work by transforming schools and spaces of learning to improve the communities of people of color.

Yosso (2005) acknowledged Anzaldúa’s (1987) perspective on using theory to uplift communities, explaining that theory should be used to empower people of color. In her study on critical race theory (CRT), Yosso responded to Anzaldúa’s challenge, asserting that community cultural wealth uses the capital of people of color—storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, stories, testimonies, and narratives—to nurture and inspire students of color to succeed. In addition, Yosso explains that centering research on the experiences of people of

color is also beneficial because it is a resource that can potentially advance an entire group. She explained that community cultural wealth is divided into six different types of capital— aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital—all of which can transform the education of people of color by utilizing assets that are abundant within their communities. Similar to Anzaldúa, CRT recognizes that communities of color have multiple strengths. Likewise, Yosso confirmed that CRT would expose the underlying racism that still exists and use people of color’s cultural wealth to restructure their educational institutions.

Villenas et al. (2006) further emphasized that if Chicanas/Latinas use the positive assets they already possess, they too can be successful. Although studies show that the underachievement of Latinos/as in the United States is growing exponentially, educators can use these notions of collaboration, solidarity, and cultural wealth within Chicana/Latina feminist theory to reconceptualize Latino/a education. This negative research on Latino/a education that is currently seen as a cultural deficit, according to Villenas et al. and other Chicana/Latina feminists, is a cultural asset.

### **Latino/a Underachievement in the United States**

Although there has been growing interest in the education of Latinos/as in the United States, the problems Latinos/as currently face are not new. With nearly half of all U.S.-born Latinos/as under the age of 18, Latinos/as represent the second-largest segment of a school-aged population, after non-Hispanic Whites, in the United States (Pérez, 2004). Despite family based social capital in many Latino/a families, contemporary research shows that much of the underachievement of Latino/as can be attributed to the unequal distribution of social opportunities and poverty (Ream, 2003). Currently only one in 10 Latinos in the United States holds a college degree, compared to more than one in four White Americans and more than one



in three Asian Americans (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Despite the many educational advances within the past several decades aimed at Latino/a achievement, many of these reforms have not been entirely successful in eradicating the chronic academic underachievement of Latinos/as (V. González & Soltero, 2011). Since Latinos/as are the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the country, scholars argue that if the high dropout rates and low educational achievement of Latino/a youth is not turned around, the United States will have a permanent underclass who will never realize their potential or contribute to American society (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; V. González & Soltero, 2011).

Although Latinos/as are chronically underachieving, research shows there is a small distinction in both Latino/a academic success and underperformance that can be explained by the length of time they have been in the country. For example, Suro (2003) did a study of second-generation Latinos/as and found that American-born Latinos/as have higher levels of educational attainment and income levels when compared to foreign-born Latinos/as. For example, in the year 2000, more than half of all foreign-born Latinos/as lacked a high school diploma when compared to only a quarter, or less, of second and third generation American-born Latinos/a. In addition to increased educational attainment, second and third generation American-born Latinos/as also tend to earn more money than first-generation Latinos/as. The study found that the Latino/a population will soon shift and second-generation Latinos/as will make up the greatest portion of the Latino/a population. According to Suro, this shift is significant because second and third generation Latinos/as will have a different impact on the country as compared to their immigrant counterparts. However, in contrast, other research by Hill and Torres (2010) and Gandara and Contreras (2009) shows that the longer Latinos/as are in the United States, the worse they perform academically. Gandara explained that there is a *ceiling effect* to Latino/a

educational success, which results in little or no improvement after the third-generation for American-born Latinos/as. Similarly, Hill and Torres found that sometimes parents try to use their manual labor to show the significance of school. However, students can misinterpret this effort, seeing it as a devaluation of school. Their study showed that after a generation or more in the United States, achieving the American Dream for Latinos/as becomes intangible, and second and third generation Latinos/as have lower achievement motivation and are less likely to succeed. Although the research from Suro, Gandara, and Hill and Torres seems to contradict each other, it is important to note that the length of time Latino/as have been in this country is a factor in educational attainment and achievement of Latinos/as and needs to be studied further.

Many U.S. born and foreign-born Latinos/as have successfully navigated the American education system; however, many still struggle academically and are the least likely ethnic group, besides Native Americans, to obtain a college degree. College graduation rates among Latinos/as are low, with only 8% of the Latino/a population graduating from college, compared to 71% of their White counterparts (Fry & Lopez, 2012; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). With such low educational attainment levels amongst the Latino/a community, it is not surprising that poverty within the Latino/a community is also great with over 23% of Latino/a families living in poverty (Stepler & Brown, 2016). The data show that at most educational levels, Latinos/as fall behind their White peers, and are especially vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation (Hill & Torres, 2010). Although there is no clear explanation for the difference in achievement levels between recently immigrated Latino/a students and those who have been in the United States for longer periods of time, studies show that families play a significant role in the educational shift for Latino/a students and it is important to build on these cultural strengths to help support the education of all Latino/a children (Fitts & McClure, 2015; B. Sánchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006).

## **Latino/a Parent Engagement**

Despite parent skepticism of schools, the research shows that Latino/a parent involvement and engagement can have a profound impact on the educational aspirations of all children while in school (Fitts & McClure, 2015; B. Sánchez et al., 2006). The research continues to show that family plays a critical role in the education of all students, especially Latino/a students (Fitts & McClure, 2015; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014; B. Sánchez et al., 2006). For example, Olivos and Mendoza (2010) examined Latino/a parent engagement in public schools and noted that immigrant Latino/a parents are sometimes unfairly excluded from participating in their children's schools due to their immigration status, language barriers, or socioeconomic status. Their study revealed that all Latino familial involvement has strengths and Latino/a parents are by far one of the most influential factors in a Latino/a child's education.

Research shows there are multiple ways to help Latino/a students succeed academically, but that family is key. For example, P. Sanchez's (2006) research shows that family plays an important role in the lives of Latino/a students through mentorship and support. Although some Latino/a parents may not have an extensive educational background, parents are the most frequently cited sources of support for students of color. In P. Sanchez's qualitative study, 41% of Latino students interviewed identified family members as providing support with: classes, going to and finishing school, choosing a major/career, the college application process, motivation toward school, and scholarships and financial aid. The author explained that mentors represent a very important form of capital and serve as a significant source of information regarding a higher education that otherwise would not be available. Some students who listed family members as mentors explained that listening to their parents' struggles was their

motivation for trying to obtain a higher education. Furthermore, students disclosed that their parents served as role models and discussed how witnessing them work so relentlessly helped them keep moving forward in school to try to obtain a higher education. Specifically, students explained that the stories of hardships and struggles their parents faced while in Mexico or the U.S. influenced students to attend college. Parents provided support by modeling what students should not do, such as work in factories with deplorable working conditions because they lacked a college education. Parents also helped students by instilling hopes and dreams for their children with pep talks, seeking support from school personnel, and monitoring academic behavior at school. The author ultimately found that Latino/a parents can influence their children's academic success by sharing their own stories of struggle. Olivos and Mendoza (2010) agree that by motivating and engaging Latino/a parents in the education of their children, Latino/a students will have increased academic achievement while in school. Olivos and Mendoza confirm that all families, regardless of immigration status, have strengths and are the most influential individuals in their children's education. However, the authors also recognize that sometimes families can feel disconnected from their children's school, which may hinder their participation.

Furthering the literature on Latino/a parent engagement, several scholars emphasize that, regardless of linguistic barriers, parents who are able to develop a relationship with their children's schools are better prepared to help their children succeed academically (Auerbach, 2004; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Poza et al., 2014). For example, Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis (2012) collected data from three different community and school-based parent programs and discovered that through empowerment, a sense of *tequio* (dedicating time willingly without getting paid), and women-led activism, many parents were able to speak their minds while feeling respected and valuable to their educational communities. Over 30 families were

interviewed over the course of 2 years. During these interviews, participants emphasized that being able to meet in environments where they could speak Spanish, bring their young children, and ask questions directly to school personnel empowered them to become advocates for their children. Many of the participants in the study revealed that being involved in the various school-related activities offered them a place to build camaraderie with other parents while mobilizing each other and becoming tools for positive school reform.

In a similar study of Latino/a parent engagement, Auerbach (2004) investigated Latino/a parent participation in a bilingual outreach program. This research confirmed that, with the correct parental support, Latino/a parents can provide the appropriate moral, emotional, and instrumental support to help their children go to college. The author emphasized that although the outreach program she studied provided resources to Latino/a students on a daily basis, the monthly parent meetings helped Latino/a parents become allies in their children's quest for a higher education. Likewise, in another study about Latino/a parent involvement, Poza et al. (2014) conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with parents regarding their level of involvement within their children's school. The data revealed different ways Latino/a parents can be involved, such as by asking questions, attending events, and altering/augmenting their children's educational trajectory. Although many Latino/a parents have many obstacles standing before them, most notably language barriers, they did not let that prevent them from advocating for their children's educational career. Overall, these three studies (Auerbach, 2004; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Poza et al., 2014) show that with the appropriate support, Latino/a parents can be instrumental in the success of their children, regardless of how long they have been in the country.

## **The Educational Experience of Latinas**

Many Latino/a families come to the United States with the goal of pursuing an education. Although Latinas are enrolling and graduating from 4-year institutions at a higher rate than Latinos, these gains have not come without significant sacrifices. Latinas who seek a higher education experience family pressures because many Latino/a parents expect their daughters to be family-oriented caretakers (Sy, 2006). Unlike their male counterparts, Latinas who are transitioning to college often have the added pressure of family obligations, which can potentially be detrimental to their academic performance. Sy (2006) found that spending time with family can have a positive effect on a Latina's transition to college. However, spending time with family to translate for her parents can negatively affect her academics. Sy explained that one possibility for this outcome is that Latina students find spending time with family more flexible versus translating, where they have less control.

K. González, Jovel, and Stoner (2004) explored other challenges Latinas face when leaving home to attend college. They found that Latinas are treated differently than Latinos because Latino/a parents are worried about who will take care of their daughters while they are away in college. K. González et al. found that Latino/a parents are convinced that young college-bound Latinas are unable to take care of themselves and only their parents, family, or spouse can take care of them. The data from this study reveal that for many Latinas, leaving home is much easier than staying away from home. While most students who leave home for college experience homesickness, for the Latinas in this study missing their family was not a first-year experience. Homesickness troubled them throughout college and even after they graduated and were debating where to go to graduate school. Although none of the women in the study could

explain their guilt for leaving home, all the women understood that the more steps they took outside of their traditional expectations, the more opportunities could be created for them later.

In a similar study regarding the stress of Latina college choice, Hernández (2015) found that high-achieving Latinas are forced to constantly balance individual and family expectations. This study focused on 17 high-achieving first-year Latina students who had several factors to consider before deciding what university they would attend: distance from home, reputation, academic rigor, and cost of attendance. Although each student was accepted to several private and Ivy League institutions, their interview narratives revealed they were forced to balance both their own academic goals with those of their families. They also had to deal with the cultural expectations of their family and a financial blockade they could not break down. Ultimately, all the women interviewed decided to go to Eastern University because it was located no more than 90 minutes away from their home. For the women in this study, going to college was not the problem, but deciding which college to attend was their ultimate dilemma.

Besides having to deal with the apprehension of leaving home and troubles with finances, Latinas must also find ways to cope with their home and school stresses. For example, Gloria and Castellanos (2012) and Gloria, Castellanos, and Orozco (2005) found that Latinas have different coping mechanisms when it comes to trying to obtain a higher education. In their 2005 study, Gloria et al. studied the perceived barriers and stresses Latinas face when trying to obtain a higher education. In their quantitative study, their survey results revealed that Latina college students will most likely speak with others, find out more about the situation, or draw upon their past lived experiences when trying to cope with problems while in college. Gloria et al.'s study also revealed that Latinas are the least likely ethnic group to seek professional help. Although

almost 40% of the interviewed Latinas agreed that barriers would make it difficult to achieve their goals, almost all (94%) agreed that they could overcome any barrier that stood in their way.

The aforementioned research confirms that Latinas face many barriers when trying to obtain a higher education. However, Gloria and Castellanos (2012) add to that research by differentiating these dilemmas between first-generation and second-generation Latinas. In a qualitative study with Latina students, the authors found that first-generation college students indicated that their path to college was a challenging struggle. However, second-generation Latina students indicated that their parents expected them to go to college, so it was never a question as to whether or not they would attend. The study also revealed that first-generation Latina students were also expected to go home every weekend, whereas second-generation Latina students simply had to remind their parents that they needed time for their academics, so they would not be able to go home on the weekends. Many of the first-generation Latina college students interviewed admitted that their parents refused to let them go to school and accused their daughters of abandoning their families. Once they did leave, their families were continuously asking them to return home whenever possible. First-generation Latinas also shared they would often send money from their financial aid packages or work study to help their family with financial obligations, unlike second-generation Latina students who also struggled with money, but were more likely to keep their money versus sending it home. Ultimately, the study found that family is critical to the success of first-generation Latina students. Although the expectations from the entire family often presented some challenges, research shows that involving family members, especially mothers who have taken a key role in the education of their children, helps facilitate the educational success of Latinas trying to obtain a 4-year degree.



## **A Latina Mother's Influence**

Mothers frequently take the primary role of raising and educating their children; various studies confirm that mothers play a significant role in the academic well-being of their children, which can include teaching manners, moral values, rules of conduct, aspirations and expectations for the future (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Fitts & McClure, 2015; Gandara, 1982; B. Sánchez et al., 2006). Latina mothers have also become known as the driving force behind their children's success (Espinoza-Herold, 2007). Oftentimes, Latinas who are trying to seek higher education have one parent who supports their desire to become independent, usually their mother, and another parent who wants them to stay at home, usually their father (Hernández, 2015). Latina mothers, in particular immigrant mothers, are also the backbone of current Latino/a families, and strive to share their lived experiences with their children in order to help them reach their educational aspirations.

In her seminal study, Gandara (1982) explained that mothers play a vital role in providing emotional support for Latinas seeking a higher education. Gandara interviewed 17 Mexican-American women who had successfully completed either an M.D., J.D., or Ph. D. degree with the goal of isolating factors that may have contributed to their high educational attainment. All of Gandara's subjects were either practicing lawyers, physicians, or professors at a university. In addition, all 17 women interviewed had come from families where neither parent had completed high school or held a job that was considered higher than a skilled laborer. Gandara's findings revealed that mothers played a vital role in fostering educational drive. Although Gandara had originally hypothesized that fathers would play a more significant role in a Chicana's academic life, the data revealed this was not the case. On the contrary, Gandara's participants shared that their mothers had just as much, or even more influence than their fathers with respect to the

decision making in their families. In addition, similar to Hernández's (2015) findings, the data also showed that mothers were more likely than fathers to encourage their daughters to obtain a higher education and be economically independent. Gandara's study revealed that the families of the women interviewed had consistently instilled the idea of a strong work ethic. As children, the students had witnessed their parents working hard, with expectations that their children would do the same. In addition, many of the students reported that their families were highly rational and not overbearing when it came to discipline. Most of the women also came from large traditional families and reported that they felt a sense of responsibility to their families and most of the time attributed their success and accomplishments to their familial support. Gandara's study results showed that the emotional support these women received was critical in their educational attainment because it was unlikely they would be able to find any kind of similar support elsewhere.

For example, in a case study that spanned over 10 years, Espinoza-Herold (2007) studied the relationship between Carla, an at-risk Latina who dropped out of high school but managed to transfer to a 4-year university, and her mother, a Mexican housewife who used *dichos*—sayings or proverbs—to teach her daughter to become self-reliant and independent. In current and past research, the author found that many Mexican-American families expect family members to help in times of need, which is key to many Latino/a families who value sharing and cooperation, especially between mothers and daughters. Carla's mother shared *dichos* to encourage her daughter to pursue a higher education. Carla then used these *dichos* to help her focus on her educational aspirations. She respected her mother and her messages because she was older, wiser, and more knowledgeable. Carla grew up listening to her mother's messages and internalized them to help her succeed academically. Carla claimed that her mother's messages

helped her respect the advice of elders and select friends who were good role models with ambitions. Ultimately the author found through the span of over 10 years and after 12 interviews that the *dichos* served to solidify Carla and her mother's relationship to help guide Carla in her academic journey. Oral traditions like *dichos* serve to ignite critical thinking and wisdom that has been handed down through many generations of mothers and daughters before Carla. The continued interpretation of the *dichos* helps deepen the respect daughters have for their mothers, who they have learned to trust and depend on. In this study, regardless of their lack of education, Latina mothers depended on what they knew to help their daughters succeed. Oral traditions that helped build a trust between a mother and daughter helped Carla obtain a higher education.

Research shows that when Latina mothers create relationships with other mothers or parents, they are better able to support their children academically (Fitts & McClure, 2015; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012). For example, in another study that focused on Latina mothers and the academic success of their children, Fitts and McClure (2015) produced an ethnographic study of 43 Latina immigrant mothers who were observed and interviewed over the span of 2 years. These Latina mothers created a network and developed relationships based on the notion of *confianza*—moral confidence or trust—which helped them create a space for learning and exchanging educational resources to better help their children. Fitts and McClure explained that *confianza* is an ideal based on trust; it reflects a commitment to the needs of others and implies a special and trusting relationship. For example, when one says someone else is *de confianza*, that means they are honorable and their moral character has been affirmed.

In the previous study, researchers observed that this group of 43 Latina immigrant mothers helped each other by creating a network among themselves to improve the educational opportunities for their families. Although there was a language barrier and many of the group's

members lacked a formal education, they were invested in the lives of their children. The group served as a space for learning and education by exchanging personal experiences, support, and guidance. The Latina women's group also helped expand their social networks and engage with "mainstream institutions and events that they designed and initiated themselves" (Fitts & McClure, 2015, p. 308). By participating in the women's group, members were able to exchange information, such as job tips, as well as resources for the "purpose of personal and collective empowerment" (p. 308). The group served as a source of inspiration as the women navigated the educational system for their children.

Other recent studies also note the leadership roles Latina mothers take for the educational advancement of their children. For example Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis (2012) shared the stories of several Latina mothers and grandmothers who took active roles in partnering with their children's schools and other school related programs. In this study of parent engagement, the authors interviewed several mothers whose narratives revealed that as a result of working with other mothers, they felt a sense of camaraderie and support. Their involvement, sometimes fueled by their husbands' lack of involvement, encouraged them to fight for their children's education. For the women of this study, their involvement offered a forum for the development of their independent voices with other Latina mothers who were facing the same challenges in educating their children. The data ultimately showed that Latina mothers are a valuable educational contribution that is sometimes overlooked by researchers and practitioners.

Latina mothers take an active role in the education of their children by protecting them and trying to seek the best available resources for them. For example, in another study examining the parenting practices of Latina mothers, Ceballo, Kennedy, Bregman, and Epstein-Ngo (2012) found that Latina mothers relied on strict monitoring, physical/social withdrawal from the

neighborhood, and positive enriching activities for children in order to be effective parents in challenging environments. A majority (61%) of the mothers interviewed claimed that strict monitoring of their children was an important part of trying to keep their children safe. In addition to strict supervision, 35% of the mothers also explained that physically and socially withdrawing themselves from their neighborhoods in order to protect themselves was also important. Mothers taught their children that they should not trust anyone in their neighborhoods in order to “avoid being contaminated by neighboring children and families” (p. 809). The data also reveal that 20% of the mothers purposely enrolled their children in extracurricular activities or after school programs in order to keep their children busy and involved in “everything that is positive” (p. 10), most of the time outside of their neighborhoods. The Latina mothers in this study explained that they valued *familismo*—prioritizing family needs, unity, and loyalty—and wanted to raise their children to be well educated. One mother stated, “Education doesn’t start at school. It starts with the family, inside the home” (p. 811). The mothers in this study had no choice but to take responsibility as the primary educators of their children within their home, and be responsible for their moral upbringing. Mothers used what they knew from their own experiences to help protect their children.

### **Latino/a Storytelling**

This study explored how Latino/a families can help shape the educational future of young Latinas who are trying to acquire a higher education by using in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews. The use of narratives allowed students of color to reflect on their lived experiences and use them for personal and communal advancement (Fernandez, 2002). By exploring the voices of young Latinas who are trying to acquire a higher education and their mothers, Fernandez (2002) claimed that researchers are better able to understand the issues

Latina students are facing in contemporary schooling. Perez-Huber (2010) supports the concept of Latino/a storytelling by explaining that a *testimonio*, the Spanish term for narrative, is a research strategy that was originally used in Latin America as a way to document the personal experiences of people of color during war. A *testimonio* is a “powerful methodological approach that uncovers the systemic subordination of Chicanas/Latinas” by repositioning them to move toward social justice (Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 1). *Testimonios* are often rooted in uncovering the historic oppression of Latinos/as and can be used to shed light on the educational experiences of Chicana/Latina women by humanizing the injustices they have endured (Huber & Cueva, 2012; Perez Huber, 2010). Although this study did not use *testimonios*, it is significant to note that *testimonios* are a verbal journey of the injustices Latinos/as have encountered throughout their life (Perez Huber, 2010). Instead, this study focused on the narratives and stories of how Latina mothers helped their daughters academically as recalled by both mothers and daughters.

Narratives and stories allow scholars to better understand the personal and academic experiences of Latinos/as in education. Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona (2012) explained that much of the growth in *testimonio* scholarship has been produced by Chicanas and Latinas because it aligns with *feminista* theory. For example, Fernandez (2002) focused on Pablo, a Latino student in a Chicago public high school, whose personal narrative revealed his inadequate schooling. Pablo’s story was made public, which can be transformative because “sharing one’s stories with others...opens up the possibility for social action” (p. 48). By looking into the stories of marginalized youth, one can obtain a better understanding of how students of color, in particular Latinos/as, are often oppressed during their educational careers.

Latino/a storytelling allows readers to witness the collective struggles of Latinos/as in education. This study used narratives shared during encounters in which Latina students and their

mothers were given a space to be vulnerable. Mothers shared how they have helped their daughters reach their educational goals. When scholars use narratives and storytelling, they become advocates of social change because they use their lived experiences as guidance.

### **Bringing it All Together**

Although Latinas are doing academically better than Latinos when obtaining a higher education, they still need support. Using a theoretical framework of Chicana/Latina feminist theory, this review shows that family, mothers in particular, play a fundamental role in the development of most Latino students' desire to obtain a higher education. Studies show that as students are trying to build capital at school, mothers are also trying to build a network of support that can potentially help them assist their children. Key studies also highlight that students of color who are supported by their families increase their odds of attending and graduating from college. In sum, Latina students have the potential to use their cultural capital and support of their families, in particular mothers, to close the educational gap. Nevertheless, a more particular kind of research is needed to detail how mothers who lack an education can specifically help their high-achieving daughters obtain a college degree.

## **CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN**

Latinas in the United States currently make up 20% of the female population, and by 2060 will compose one third of our total female population (Gandara, 2015). Although Latinas are outperforming Latinos academically (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011), they are still earning less money than their Latino counterparts in the labor market and are more likely to be single mothers and living in poverty (Gandara, 2015). In addition, Latinas have some of the lowest high school graduation rates and college completion rates among all women (Gandara, 2015; Lapayese, 2013; Schwartz, 2001). With the strong emphasis that Latinos/as place on familial relationships, in particular mother/daughter relationships, a further exploration of how Latina mothers and female guardians help their daughters academically is warranted (Fry, 2002).

### **Research Questions**

1. How do first-generation Latina college graduates understand their educational journey and academic achievements? How do their immigrant mothers understand their daughter's educational journey and academic achievements? How, if at all, do these understandings differ?
2. Based on their own experiences what advice, suggestions, or ideas can first-generation Latina college graduates and their immigrant mothers provide to community and educational leaders to strengthen the educational trajectories of first-generation Latinas and their families?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study used a qualitative research design to explore the individual stories of Latina college graduates and their mothers in order to interpret and make meaning of their educational



journeys. This research captures how participants view their own world, thoughts, perceptions, and values. Although human behavior is complex, qualitative research can generate multiple interpretations and meanings from the words of the participants (Medina & Luna, 2000). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that qualitative research tries to uncover how people interpret their experiences and how they make meaning of these experiences. Since the goal of this study was to illuminate the relationship between mothers and daughters, a quantitative design would not have been appropriate. A quantitative study, by definition, uses numbers as data and analyzes them using statistical techniques, which in this case would not have yielded the desired results (Creswell et al., 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, quantitative researchers usually use variables and see explanations in terms of statistical relationships between those different variables (Maxwell, 2013). Rather than studying the rate at which Latinas enter or leave college, this study used a narrative approach to illuminate how first-generation Latina students understand their academic relationship with their mothers in terms of “people, situations, events, and the processes that connect these” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 29). Maxwell (2013) emphasized that an important aspect of qualitative research is that explanations are based on how some situations or events influence others. By interviewing first-generation Latina college graduates and their mothers, my goal was to produce a story-oriented and chronological explanation of the interactions these students had with their mothers during their educational journeys (Creswell et al., 2007). By using a qualitative design to gather these individual stories, we can understand how Latina students interpret and made meaning of how their mothers helped them obtain a college degree (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Site.** The participants in this study were all graduates from the El Monte Union High School District, which is located in the San Gabriel Valley, 12 miles east of Downtown Los

Angeles. This site was chosen because it is a primarily Latino/a immigrant working class community. Although the cities of El Monte and South El Monte are considered high poverty areas with low education levels, the school district is performing better than other districts in Southern California with similar demographics. Regardless of the district's median income and educational level, many first-generation Latina students from El Monte and South El Monte have been able to apply to, enroll in, and attend 4-year universities across the state and country after graduating from high school. Consequently, using first-generation Latina graduates from the El Monte Union High School District gave me a substantial pool of participants to interview.

**Participants.** This study involved 14 participants: seven first-generation Latina college graduates and their seven mothers. The student participants in this study and their mothers met the following criteria:

1. First-generation Latina student who graduated from one of the six high schools in the El Monte Union High School District.
2. Recently graduated (within 5 years) from a 4-year college/university.
3. Have a mother, or female guardian, who self-identifies as Latina and agrees to participate in the study and also be interviewed.

By selecting students who had recently graduated from college, I was able to ensure that the participants were qualified to attend college and thus had been considered college bound.

Students were recruited through social media, email, telephone, and community recommendations. The study participants were eventually selected based on their availability and the type of college they attended as an undergraduate. I wanted to make sure their colleges were diverse and there was an equal representation of California State universities (Cal States), Universities of California (UCs), and private institutions in the study. I contacted the participants

and interviewed them via Google Hangout or in person for their first in-depth interview based on their availability. The second follow-up interviews were done over the phone.

**Access.** As an instructional coach within the El Monte Union High School District, I had access to several women who had recently graduated from a 4-year university. I also asked administrators and classified employees for recommendations of past students who they believed would be interested in and eligible to participate in the study. This idea of recruitment stems from snowball sampling where the researcher finds an individual with the desired characteristics for the study and then uses that person's social networks to recruit other participants (Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010).

I introduced myself as a community member, instructional coach, former teacher, and alumna of the El Monte Union High School district who was currently doing research to uplift the community. As an instructional coach within the district, it is my job to work with teachers, so any work related to this study was done after work hours. Now that the study is done, I have shared the results with families, community members, and schools at conferences and school workshops throughout the San Gabriel Valley. In addition, I also plan to present my findings to the superintendent and school board with the goal of acquiring more support for first-generation Latinas who wish to obtain a higher education.

**Data collection methods.** This study involved first-generation Latina student participants and their immigrant mothers. Each college graduate was interviewed twice to assess her perception of how her mother helped her acquire a higher education. Their mothers were also interviewed to further validate and support the data collected by the study participants. For this research, there was an initial semi-structured *plática* with each student participant and one with each mother. A follow-up *plática* was conducted with each college graduate and her mother to

clarify and add nuance to data from the initial *plática*. These follow-up *pláticas* were also done individually. The initial *plática* focused on the educational backgrounds of the participants as related to their upbringing and relationship with their mothers and early education. The follow-up *pláticas* focused on clarifying any misunderstandings from the initial *plática* and capturing their perspective on what could benefit the educational trajectory of first-generation Latinas who are trying to obtain a higher education.

All *plática* questions were designed to collect narratives about how first-generation Latinas made sense of and understood the ways in which their mothers supported them in their educational pursuits. I used an interview agenda with open-ended questions designed for deeper probing. Bodies of literature in the areas of parent involvement, storytelling, and Chicana/Latina theory helped guide the protocol development. All *plática* questions reflected this study's research questions, which helped in the developing of themes and subthemes. These themes included storytelling, family involvement, pre-college programs, and college transitions.

**Mechanics of data collection methods and analysis.** The college graduates were interviewed in a quiet location (home, office, or classroom) in person or via video conference. Their mothers were interviewed in person either in their homes, their jobs, or my office. An iPhone, computer, and iPad were used to capture all *pláticas*, which were later transcribed for analysis by rev.com. College graduates were given a journal and a \$10 gift card to Starbucks for their voluntary participation in the study. Their mothers were also given a \$10 gift card to Starbucks for their voluntary participation. After each *plática*, the recorded audio was transcribed and compared to the audio to ensure accuracy. After this, I went through the process of open coding, which allowed for themes to emerge organically in the data, such as stories of struggle, mothers attending school events for their daughters, providing transportation to extracurricular

activities, providing a quiet space to do schoolwork, and offering words of encouragement. Open coding is significant to qualitative research because in order to uncover, name, and develop concepts, data must be broken down, examined closely, and compared for similarities and differences (Wuetherick, 2010).

Once I read and re-read the interview transcripts looking for various themes using open coding, I grouped events, happenings, objects, memories, and actions/interactions that were similar in nature together to form categories that described how first-generation Latina mothers and daughters worked together during elementary, middle school, and high school. Ultimately, these different categories and subcategories were analyzed to create hypotheses, conclusions, and implications for further research. Pilot interviews were an important part of the research process and were conducted prior to real interviews in this study. By conducting a pilot study, I ensured that my proposed methods were appropriate and not too complicated (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002).

### **Ethical Issues**

There were no foreseen ethical issues arising from this study. The participants in this study had already graduated from high school and I had no connection or relationship to their current occupation or schooling. Upon request, the participants could also receive a copy of the findings to ensure that nothing had been falsified or misunderstood. I also ensured participant confidentiality and anonymity by creating pseudonyms for each participant and protecting all files related to their interviews under password protection on my personal computer to which no one else had access. Participants also had the option of asking to stop the recording if they wanted to say something off the record. Since the participants could also obtain a copy of the

findings upon request, they had the option of clarifying any statements that could possibly have been misinterpreted or have revealed their identity.

### **Credibility/Trustworthiness**

A threat to the credibility of my study was my bias in the sample selection and interpretation of data as well as participant reactivity. As a Latina professional who has a positive relationship with her mother and grew up in the same community as the participants who I was interviewing, the interpretation of the data could potentially be biased. Participants could have also said what they thought I wanted to hear. However, I addressed these concerns by using direct quotes from multiple interviews with the same participants that helped confirm or contradict any biases. In addition, the data analysis were also systematic, which helped prevent cherry picking favorite quotes from participants. In terms of participant reactivity, the goal of a qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence but to understand it and use it productively (Maxwell, 2013). Even though participants eventually revert to normal, in order to limit reactivity, I practiced my interviewing and listening skills so that I could learn how to build rapport with the participants and encourage honest answers.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

### Introduction: Lessons Learned

This chapter summarizes the narratives of a qualitative study that focused on first-generation Latina college graduates and their immigrant mothers. These narratives focus on the educational trajectories of these first-generation Latinas and the support their mothers provided regardless of their own lack of education. These findings are based on an analysis of an initial semi-structured *plática* and a follow-up *plática* that focused on two research questions:

1. How do first-generation Latina college graduates understand their educational journey and academic achievements? How do their immigrant mothers understand their daughter's educational journey and academic achievements? How, if at all, do these understandings differ?
2. Based on their own experiences what advice, suggestions, or ideas can first-generation Latina college graduates and their immigrant mothers provide to community and educational leaders to strengthen the educational trajectories of first-generation Latinas and their families?

To address these questions, mothers and daughters participated in initial and follow-up *pláticas*, which were conducted individually. Each initial *plática* was approximately 50-120 minutes, and the follow-up *plática* was approximately between 20-30 minutes. After both *pláticas*, data were transcribed and organized into emergent themes through an open coding process. As findings emerged, I compared the similarities and differences between the participants' narratives. Each narrative includes a figure that begins with a short summary describing the college graduate's academic journey and her mother's involvement, followed by the findings that emerged from the narratives as well as the demographic data for both the

college graduate and her mother. Lastly the figure includes the daughter and mother's reflection on next steps in terms of how community and educational leaders can further support first-generation Latinas who want to obtain a higher education.

### **Findings: Emergent Themes**

Within each narrative, I embed both the college graduate and her mother's responses to the interview protocol to humanize their experiences. Based on these *pláticas* there were several common themes that emerged as findings across the participants' narratives. These findings illuminate how both the college graduates and their mothers understand the educational journey of the first-generation Latina college graduates. These narratives and common findings help describe what both community and educational leaders can do to help other first-generation Latinas obtain a higher education. These findings include the following:

**1. Stories of struggles: Struggle was used as a motivation to acquire a higher education by first-generation Latinas.** The mothers in this study share their personal stories of struggle to serve as a motivation for their daughters to attain a higher education. The finding of stories of struggle can be understood in the narratives as poverty, lack of exposure to a college setting, immigrant journeys, unhappy marriages, and mothers wanting to give their daughters what they did not have.

**2. Unconditional support: Mothers will support daughters at all costs.** Although the mothers in this study lack a higher education they made the education of their daughters a priority. They did what they could to support their daughters' academic journeys. The finding of unconditional support can be understood in the narratives as words of wisdom, financial support, sacrificial support, transportation to and from events, project support, attendance at school events, and familial support.



**3. Additional academic support outside of the family: First-generation Latinas rely on intervention programs for academic support.** The Latina college graduates in this study explained that their families lacked the educational background to help them apply to and obtain a higher education. Therefore, the participants looked outside the family to try to fill this void. The finding of additional academic support outside of the family in the narratives is understood as outside mentors, pre-college programs, field trips, influential teachers, and scholarship opportunities.

**4. College persistence: First-generation Latinas must cultivate individual resiliency to persevere in college.** An important part of the educational journey of all the college graduates in this study was finishing college. In many of the narratives, the Latina college graduates explained that their families were unable to help them during their transition to college but tried to be supportive in other ways. The finding of college persistence in the narratives is understood as applying to and being accepted into college, deciding what college to attend, insurmountable guilt upon leaving, wanting to drop out, and graduating from college.

**5. They just don't get it: There is a misalignment between immigrant family expectations and the U.S. educational system.** The Latina college graduates in this study explained that although their mothers tried to be supportive there were many instances when their mothers and fathers did not understand why and what they were doing. The section labeled "they just don't get it" highlights examples of gender stereotypes, battling machismo, English barriers, and an overall lack of understanding as to why the daughters are doing what they are doing at school to get ahead academically.

## **Introduction to Narratives**

The following narratives are the personal stories of first-generation Latina college graduates and their mothers. All the excerpts from the mother's *pláticas* have remained in Spanish to retain their authenticity but have been translated to the best of my ability. These stories reflect the varying perspectives from both the daughters and mothers of what it took for the daughters to acquire their higher education. All names in the narratives have been changed to pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and privacy. The names of their colleges and varying organizations pertaining to certain colleges, such as sororities, have also been changed to maintain each participant's anonymity. After each narrative both the college graduate and her mother reflect on the college graduate's educational journey and provide suggestions and ideas as to what could have made this process easier not only for them, but also for future first-generation Latinas who hope to attain a higher education.

### **Narrative 1: Nancy and Catalina**

Nancy grew up in a single bedroom that was shared with her two siblings and parents. She explained, "We had no kitchen, living room, or personal space to call our own. Privacy did not exist. That room was the only place I could call home." Her family of five rented a bedroom in a home that was shared with several other families. Nancy explained that her family would get upset when she would study late at night during high school because she had to leave a light on. She said, "At times I felt my sacrifices were irrelevant because my family only considered their need for sleep first." There were many times when Nancy did her homework in the restroom. "It was really uncomfortable but it prevented arguments," Nancy said.

Nancy graduated with top honors from high school. She is the oldest of three siblings and is currently working as a trade analyst for a mutual funds corporation on the East Coast. Nancy

has a sister, Elena, who is 2 years younger and studies nursing at a small private Catholic college in Southern California. Nancy also has a 13-year-old brother, Ernesto, who was diagnosed with autism at the age of 4 and is cared for full time by Nancy’s mom, Catalina.

<p><b>Narrative Summary:</b> Nancy is the oldest daughter of Catalina and Hector. She was raised in a very humble home with her two parents and two siblings. She worked diligently during elementary, middle school, and high school and earned good grades. She was accepted to and attended a very prestigious private university on the East Coast, Wiltern College. The following narrative describes her educational journey through her eyes and her mother’s eyes.</p> <p><b>Findings Included in Narrative:</b> <i>Stories of Struggle</i> (poverty), <i>Unconditional Support</i> (staying up late and financial support), <i>Additional Academic Support Outside the Family</i> (mentors, scholarship programs, field trips, AP Classes, clubs, and community service), <i>College Persistence</i> (homesickness and not fitting in), and <i>They Just Don’t Get It</i> (battling machismo culture, not being allowed to participate in various clubs, and dealing with gender stereotypes).</p>	
<p><b>Nancy (College Graduate)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Age:</b> 22 years old</li> <li>● <b>Nationality:</b> US Citizen</li> <li>● <b>Edu. Level:</b> BA from small prestigious private college, Wiltern College, on the East Coast.</li> <li>● <b>Major:</b> Political Science and Latin American Studies</li> <li>● <b>Rel. Status:</b> Single</li> <li>● <b>Current Occupation:</b> Trade Analyst</li> <li>● Lived away from home during college and currently lives away from home.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Catalina (Mom)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Age:</b> 47 Years Old</li> <li>● <b>Nationality:</b> Michoacán, Mexico</li> <li>● <b>Edu. Level:</b> Middle School</li> <li>● <b>Rel. Status:</b> Married for 23 years</li> <li>● <b>Occupation:</b> Homemaker</li> <li>● <b>Dad Edu. Level:</b> Sixth Grade</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Summary and demographic data for Nancy and Catalina.

Nancy’s father, Hector, has a sixth-grade education and came to the United States when he was 18 years old. He bought a bus ticket to Tijuana from Michoacán, Mexico, and crossed the desert by walking. Nancy does not know the full details of her father’s immigrant story because he does not like to talk about or remember the ordeal. Hector has been working at the same fancy steak house for the last 35 years. He has worked his way up from a busboy to a chef. Nancy has heard about the restaurant her dad works at her entire life, but unfortunately has never been able to enjoy a meal there because “our lack of income impedes us.”

Nancy's mom, Catalina, was born and raised in Michoacán, Mexico. Catalina shared that she always liked school and really wanted to continue her schooling past her middle school education, but in those days it was just too costly for her family. Catalina started a short certification course as an administrative assistant in Michoacán, but unfortunately never finished.

Although Catalina was never able to obtain a higher education, and has no formal schooling past middle school, she proudly said that she always made sure to tell her daughters that she wanted them to obtain a higher education in whatever field they chose. Catalina stressed that she always told her children that although she wanted an education, her family simply could not afford the cost, a misfortune she never wanted her children to go through.

Catalina also said she always wanted her daughters to be strong and self-confident and made sure to teach them to always stick up for themselves and most importantly ask questions and seek help when they did not understand something. Catalina explained that by asking for help from others at least "*sentían un apoyo... del cual yo no les podía dar*" (felt some type of support... which I could not provide) because she lacked an education.

Although Catalina only went to middle school, Nancy shared this did not stop her mother from supporting her academic choices. Nancy knew her mom "was always going to be there for me." Even though sometimes Catalina would get frustrated with Nancy because she was overly involved with extracurricular activities, Nancy said her mom still helped her. For example, when Nancy had projects, "She would help me with the small things, like cutting things out, or just gluing things together." Catalina also shared something similar during her *plática* and explained that she tried to support Nancy by keeping her company and giving her coffee or warm oatmeal when Nancy had to stay up late to complete homework. Catalina said, "*Yo me estaba con ella*

*hasta la noche, para que ella no se durmiera*” (I would stay with her at night to make sure she did not go to sleep).

During Nancy’s *plática*, she explained she always worked hard and earned good grades, but it has not always been easy. Nancy said that when she was younger she was placed in a bilingual education program that her local school district offered. Nancy was taught in 70% Spanish and 30% English up until the second grade. The problem arose when she entered the third grade and everything was taught in English. Nancy shared, “Once I hit third grade, [it] was a complete change. It was all English. I never had much practice in terms of speaking the language a lot, because I always spoke Spanish at home.” Catalina also recalls this difficult time in Nancy’s educational journey and shares that she felt guilty that Nancy was having such a hard time transitioning from Spanish to English. Catalina said,

*Me sentí mal, si me sentí mal, pero luego dije “No esto le va a servir a mi hija y adelante, le va a servir, aunque ahorita haya bajado poquito, pero ella va a alcanzar el nivel al que ella quiere estar y lo va a alcanzar,” yo le dije eso, y sí lo alcanzó.*

(I felt bad, yes, I felt bad. But then I said, “No this is going to help my daughter move on, this is going to help her even though right now her grades dropped a little she will reach the level she needs to,” and she did.)

Both Nancy and her mother, Catalina, acknowledge this was a difficult transition, but not as difficult as when Nancy applied to and left for college.

Although Nancy admits that she never felt a lot of pressure at home in terms of applying to or attending college, her parents always expected her to earn good grades, which Nancy did. She also tried to join clubs, sports, and take leadership roles. However, Nancy said that the problem was that her parents did not really understand why any of this was necessary. Catalina said, “*Cuando iba en la high school no me gustaba que quería involucrarse en tantas cosas, porque yo la veía con tanto estrés*” (When she was in high school I didn’t like that she wanted to

be involved in so many activities because I would see that she was stressed). Catalina admitted that at one point she and her husband asked Nancy to drop a few clubs, to which Nancy responded with a hand-written letter explaining why being involved in clubs and sports was important, giving her a better advantage when applying to and going to college. At that point, Catalina said that she did not have any other option but to apologize to Nancy for not knowing. Catalina said, "*Le pedimos disculpa*" (we asked for an apology). Catalina acknowledged that perhaps she was a little too "*dura*" (tough) with Nancy, but she was worried that she was not sleeping or eating properly because of Nancy's extra responsibilities with clubs and advanced classes. Catalina told Nancy, "*Discúlpanos por nuestra ignorancia...discúlpanos porque ahora vemos que todo lo que tú haces es para poder sobresalir*" (Forgive us for our ignorance...forgive us because now we can see that everything you do is for you to try to be successful).

Nancy acknowledged that her parents never really talked about going to college because they were afraid that it was going to be too costly, and frankly did not know the process. Even though Catalina would attend the parent classes and workshops that Nancy's schools offered she had never stepped foot on a university campus until Nancy won a scholarship through QuestBridge to attend a conference at Stanford University. Catalina explained that Nancy was part of a pre-college program and she met with a mentor, Mr. Grimes, after school, and that is where both Catalina and Nancy started learning more about the college application process. Attending this conference was no easy task, however. Nancy said her dad was upset and told her that going to this conference was "*solo un capricho*" (her just being stubborn). Nancy tried to explain to her father that this was not the case and kept "bugging" her dad explaining that "this is something that is going to be very helpful, [because] there's going to be college counselors there." According to Nancy, the conference had already been paid for through her scholarship;

she just had to pay for transportation to get to the conference. Eventually Nancy's dad, Hector, bought both Nancy and Catalina round trip bus tickets to Stanford. Catalina explained, "*Fue la primera vez que yo conocí una universidad, y hasta a mí me gusto porque ya tuve una idea de cómo iba a ser como cuando se fuera a ir mi hija*" (It was the first time I had gone to a university and even I liked it because it gave me an idea of how it was going to be when my daughter left).

Nancy said she and her mom went to every single parent workshop and that is when her mom realized "college was going to be a good thing." This conference is also where Nancy learned about Wiltern College, the small private liberal arts college on the East Coast that she would eventually attend once she graduated from high school. After the conference, Nancy:

knew that [she] really wanted to go to a liberal arts college [because she] didn't want to be overwhelmed with so many people. I wanted to go to a school that was much smaller, like say about 5,000 students or less. And I wanted smaller classrooms, and I wanted to get to know my professors, and I didn't want to be in large lecture rooms with TAs and stuff.

Her senior year, Nancy applied to about to 15 colleges and universities. She applied to a variety of UCs, Cal States, and private schools. Nancy said that her parents did not understand what she was doing or where she was applying; moreover, she was also trying to keep it private because of the details of her personal statement. When asked why she did not want to share her personal statement with her parents she said, "I didn't want to feel like I was being ungrateful, that's why I never shared it [with my parents]." Nancy's personal statement described her home and lack of privacy, an idea that Nancy says may have caused her parents to criticize her if they knew about what she had written.

Nancy was accepted into 14 of the 15 schools to which she applied. Although Catalina said that she told Nancy she could go to any school she wanted, Nancy said otherwise. Nancy said that her parents insisted she go to local schools like UCLA or UC Riverside, which were

both about an hour away from her home. Nancy said her dad has a very *machista* perspective, meaning that he sometimes wants to control what Nancy does simply because she is a young woman. Nancy said her father always made comments like, “How do you think you’re going to go out of state? You’re a young woman, how is it that you’re going to abandon your parents?” Nancy admits that hearing words like this was difficult, especially since it happened often. Nancy’s dad, Hector, would repeatedly say things like, “A young girl isn’t supposed to leave the home, they can only leave the home until they’re married, and that’s what I expect of you as well.”

Nancy had never traveled much and said that she and her family would sometimes visit family in Mexico, nothing more. She never even had the opportunity to explore California, so the urge to leave to the East Coast for college was very strong. Although it was difficult and Catalina thought that this desire to leave “*se le va a pasar porque aquí también hay universidades buenas*” (would pass because there are good universities here, too). It did not. Nancy was determined to leave California and attend college out of state.

Eventually both Catalina and Hector allowed Nancy leave to Wiltern College, not necessarily because they wanted to, but more so because they could not afford for Nancy to stay and attend college in California. Wiltern College gave Nancy a full academic scholarship, something UCLA, UC Riverside, nor any of the Cal States to which she had been accepted could provide. Nancy explained,

I think ultimately my parents were supportive of Wiltern College, because although it was out of state...my parents realized, “We can’t pay for these other colleges.” My parents couldn’t take out loans because my dad has no credit. With Wiltern College, I think my first year I only paid a hundred dollars out of pocket. Plus, my round-trip tickets, I mean my parents paid for my first ticket to go to Wiltern, and I paid all my other flights myself. It ultimately came out to be a lot cheaper.



Once Nancy left for college Catalina, said she was sad and would cry, but never told Nancy. On the contrary, she would tell Nancy that if she ever felt sad or alone at Wiltern College, she should call her, which Nancy did on several occasions. When Nancy would call, sometimes in the middle of the night, Catalina would tell her “*échale ganas*” (colloquial term for “put in some effort”). Nancy confirmed that Catalina would in fact answer the phone “and just be there, and talk to me. She [would] be like ‘I don’t know what you’re going through, but I’ll be here on the phone with you, you can just talk.’” Nancy said that when she left for college, Catalina would tell her to “come home,” but her tone changed as time passed. Toward the end of her first year going into her second year, Nancy said her mom would tell her, “You already got through the first year. You can get through the second year.” Catalina kept encouraging Nancy to call her, even though Nancy said her mom could never really understand what Nancy was going through during this transition.

Eventually after several exams and study abroad experiences throughout Latin America and Europe, Nancy graduated from Wiltern College and her family was able to attend her graduation. Although Nancy was happy, this accomplishment was not without more familial disagreements. At the end of her senior year Nancy, had secured a job as an analyst at a large trade company near Wiltern College and decided to stay and live on the East Coast. This made Nancy’s dad, Hector, very upset. After her graduation, Hector insisted that Nancy return home to her family, but Nancy refused. In response, Hector also refused to help Nancy financially while she transitioned to her new job. Nancy said that she had asked her dad for a loan to help her with her expenses until she received her first paycheck from her new job, but he refused. Catalina said that, in Hector’s eyes, Nancy should have come home after graduation. Catalina explained that her husband got very upset with her for not trying to convince Nancy to go home after

graduation. Catalina said, “*Yo no la quiero tenerla a fuerza aquí como mi esposo*” (I didn’t want to force her to be here like my husband). Catalina has never had an official job with a set schedule or salary because she has always taken care of her son, Ernesto, who has autism. However, that did not stop her from helping Nancy after graduation. Catalina explained, “*Yo siempre les doy y les digo, ‘No se preocupen pídame a mi yo siempre tengo [dinero]’*” (I always provide and tell them, “Don’t worry, ask me, I always have [money].”) Catalina gave Nancy the money she needed after graduation, but to avoid further arguments, did not tell Hector.

During Catalina’s *plática*, she explained that her husband pays for all the home expenses and bills with the money he receives from the restaurant. Nevertheless, sometimes Hector gives her \$50 or \$100 every 2 weeks to buy anything she may need for herself like a blouse, a haircut, or a pair of tennis shoes. When Catalina explained where she got the money from to help Nancy after graduation, she lifted her arms toward the bedroom she shares with her family and said, “*pero yo no necesito nada*” (but I don’t need anything).

As Nancy’s *plática* came to an end, she was asked if there was anything else she could say about her educational journey. With tears in her eyes she explained that she felt an insurmountable amount of guilt. At one point Nancy tried to convince her sister, Elena, to also study on the East Coast, but Elena reproached her and said, “You don’t know what it was like for our family when you left. Unlike you, I would never do that to our parents.” Nancy said she has worked hard, but it has not been without struggle or now more so without guilt. For example, “I could never tell my mom I prefer to shop at Whole Foods, she would never understand.”

Nancy continues to live on the East Coast in a beautiful apartment that she shares with a roommate. She visits her family about once a year. Her father continues to insist Nancy come home. In contrast, Catalina says, “*Nunca la obligara hacer algo que no quiere*” (I would never

force her to do something she doesn't want to). In the meantime, Nancy said she will continue living and working on the East Coast until she decides where she wants to go to graduate school.

### **Nancy and Catalina: Reflection, Advice, Suggestions, and Ideas to Further Support First-Generation Latina College Graduate Success**

As Catalina reflected on her daughter's academic journey she laughed and said, "*No era fácil*" (it wasn't easy). Catalina was very specific when she said, "*Entre más programas existan para los niños y para los papas, es mejor porque tienen más oportunidades de que los niños vayan a la universidad*" (The more programs that exist for the students and for the parents, the better because they will have more opportunities to attend college.)

Nevertheless, Catalina said these programs and opportunities need to be relevant to the communities they serve. She admitted that when she sees a workshop announcement that does not specifically say it will be offered in Spanish, "*No voy*" (I won't go). She explained that sometimes people are embarrassed to ask for translation services and will attend workshops but not learn anything, that is why "*Es muy importante que todo sea bilingüe*" (It is very important that everything be bilingual). Catalina also suggested that extra support at school be provided specifically for first-generation students. She said,

*Estuviera mejor que hubiera más ayuda solamente para los de la primera generación para que ellos puedan tener diferentes fuentes de apoyo. Yo veía que era muy difícil saber qué hacer para ir a la universidad y se necesita que nuestros hijos tengan más orientación para poder dirigirse.*

(It would be better if there were more specific help for first-generation students so they can have different avenues of support. I saw how difficult it was to know what to do to go to college and it is necessary that our children have more support in order to know what to do and be able to navigate themselves.)

Catalina also reflected on her visit to Stanford through the QuestBridge program and recalled how impactful it was in her understanding of what it meant to go to college. Catalina explained

that opportunities like those “*sirven como motivación para los papás y alumnos*” (serve as motivation for both the parents and students). She explained that very few students had been accepted into the program and it was a shame that others could not benefit from such an amazing opportunity.

When Nancy reflected on her academic journey and what could potentially be helpful to other first-generation college bound Latinas, she laughed nervously and said, “It’s weird because I just graduated and am still learning, still growing, and really don’t know what I want to do with my life.” Nancy acknowledged that her life is just starting, but was sincere when she said there needs “to be a strategic way for young students to look for colleges and universities that fit both their interests and economic needs.” She said that sometimes students attend various colleges and universities not knowing what they are getting into only to be swimming in debt once they graduate, if they graduate.

If there was only a way to pair up young students with mentors who have gone through the process and are pursuing their dream jobs and careers. But not just any kind of mentor, someone you can relate to! Specifically, someone who maybe also grew up in El Monte and perhaps also a woman.

Nancy said that she knows there are great programs that are currently available like AVID and Upward Bound, but in her opinion individualized support would be better.

Both Catalina and Nancy said that more support is necessary to help other first-generation Latinas obtaining a college degree, but not just any kind of support, they both agreed that this support needs to be relevant and purposeful to the individual needs of both the students and their families.

## Narrative 2: Victoria and Juanita

<p><b>Narrative Summary:</b> Victoria explains that her mother, Juanita, is the backbone to her academic success. Victoria is a middle child and was valedictorian of her graduating high school class. She earned a full academic scholarship to a top tier Ivy League institution, Clinton University, and is currently working on her master’s degree at the same university. The following narrative describes her educational journey through the perspective of both her and her mother.</p> <p><b>Findings Included in Narrative:</b> <i>Unconditional Support</i> (staying up late, providing rides, attending workshops at school, and financial support), <i>Additional Academic Support Outside the Family</i> (mentors, scholarship programs, field trips, and clubs), <i>College Persistence</i> (homesickness), and <i>They Just Don’t Get It</i> (battling machismo culture and dealing with gender stereotypes).</p>	
<p><b>Victoria (College Graduate)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Age:</b> 26 years old</li> <li>• <b>Nationality:</b> US Citizen</li> <li>• <b>Edu. Level:</b> BA from Ivy League University on the East Coast, Clinton University.</li> <li>• <b>Major:</b> Environmental Sciences and Policy</li> <li>• <b>Rel. Status:</b> Single</li> <li>• <b>Current Occupation:</b> MA Student at Clinton University</li> <li>• Lived away from home during college and currently lives away from home.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Juanita (Mom)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Age:</b> 54 Years Old</li> <li>• <b>Nationality:</b> Michoacán, Mexico</li> <li>• <b>Edu. Level:</b> Middle School</li> <li>• <b>Rel. Status:</b> Married for 31 years</li> <li>• <b>Occupation:</b> Business Owner</li> <li>• <b>Dad Edu. Level:</b> Middle School</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Summary and demographic data for Victoria and Juanita.

Victoria is Juanita and Miguel’s middle child. She has an older sister, Elizabeth, who graduated with her BA from a Cal State and currently lives out of state with her partner. Victoria also has a younger brother, Sebastian, who is currently enrolled in another Cal State and lives at home with his parents. Victoria was the valedictorian of her high school graduating class and attended a top tier Ivy League institution on the East Coast, Clinton University, after high school. Victoria said she is the epitome of a lifelong learner, as she is finishing her MA at her alma mater and is contemplating her next career move.

Victoria is not boastful; when asked what her greatest academic accomplishment has been she did not say being valedictorian or student of the year for several consecutive years, or

even earning acceptance to several of the nation's top schools. Instead, Victoria said her greatest accomplishment was participating in her high school's a cappella choir. Victoria explained that she had always done well academically, so being valedictorian was no surprise, but her acceptance into one of her high schools most competitive choirs was a surprise. However, she does not take full credit for these accomplishment; instead she credits her mother, Juanita, who Victoria says is just as ambitious as, if not more than, herself.

Juanita immigrated to the United States from Michoacán, Mexico, and always told her children they would go on to acquire a higher education, even though she admits that she did not necessarily believe it herself. Juanita always attended the parent workshops her child's school offered, but when she would hear about the costs associated with obtaining a college degree, she could not help but feel disappointed. The workshop facilitators would tell the parents that they should open a separate savings account for college and save their tax refunds for their child's college education fund. Juanita said, "*Mi esposo no iba a querer dejar ese dinero para la universidad de nuestros hijos...yo no veía la más mínima posibilidad de que mis hijos fueran a la universidad*" (My husband would never want to use that money for our kid's university costs ...I couldn't imagine the slightest possibility that my children could one day go on to a university). Nevertheless, as time went on and Juanita continued going to these workshops she began to hear that if her children "*le echaban ganas, si podrían calificar...ellos tenían que hacerlo por su propia cuenta*" (made an effort, they would be able to qualify they just had to do it for themselves).

Juanita and her husband, Miguel, only went on to middle school, but regardless of their lack of education, Victoria says her mom, Juanita, was the backbone of her academic success. Besides being one of Victoria's biggest supporters, Juanita also served as a motivation for what

Victoria did not want to be in life. Victoria says that many of the individuals that surrounded her “both young and old had no ambitions...they kind of were just like, ‘Well, this is what my life is.’” In contrast, Victoria said she wanted more. Victoria clearly remembers her sister Elizabeth asking their mom once what her goals were, but Juanita responded by stating, “What do you mean goals? This is my life.” Although Victoria made it clear that she did not want to be like her mom, she clarified that this statement did not mean that she did not love her mom or appreciate her efforts. In contrast, Victoria said she used her mother’s story of struggle to become a stronger student.

Juanita said that she always told her daughters that she wanted them to be better than her. *“Yo les metía mucho la ilusión de que ellas tenían que ser diferentes, que no importaba donde viviéramos pero que ellas tenían que ser mejor”* (I would give them idea that they had to be different, that it didn’t matter where we lived because they had to be better). In addition, Juanita also explained that the last thing she wanted her children to do was work in menial jobs when instead they could obtain an education and do everything she and her husband could not. Juanita said,

*Para trabajar en el campo es mejor quedarse en México. Yo estoy muy orgullosa de que yo nunca les exigí [a mis hijos] que fueran a trabajar. Yo prefería que estudiaran. Mientras que nosotros podamos pagar la casa y la renta ellos tenían que estudiar.*

(To work in the fields, you’re better off staying in Mexico. I am very proud that I never forced my children to get jobs. I’d rather they study. As long as we could pay for our home and rent, they needed to study.)

Victoria took advantage of her mother’s unconditional support. Although Juanita could not help Victoria with assignments directly, because she did not understand the language or material, Victoria said she helped her with everything else. Victoria was involved in “a ton of clubs” and several extracurricular and pre-college activities. Besides the time commitment, there

were also financial burdens associated with these activities. Although, Juanita did not have a stable job she did what she could and made floral arrangements and “*recuerdos*” (small favors usually given at Latino/a celebrations) to supplement her family’s income and help pay for Victoria’s choir fees. Several of Victoria’s activities were expensive, but Victoria:

felt like there was nothing I couldn’t do because I had my mom, you know. Like, she was always going to be my number one fan. Like, no matter what. Even if something was gonna be a little bit hard, my mom had my back, always cheering me on. She never told me no, or that I couldn’t do it.

Besides her mother’s efforts, Victoria and Juanita also credit the various pre-college programs that Victoria was involved in during her educational career. Victoria shared that she participated in AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) during high school and found it extremely rewarding, especially during the college application process. She shared,

I really liked AVID because it helped me be organized. I always got everything done on time. AVID also helped during the whole college application process. My parents didn’t go to college, so they didn’t know anything about the FAFSA or an essay...and AVID really helps you with all of that.

Victoria was also happy that many of the skills she learned through the AVID program helped her when she got to college like using Cornell notes and staying organized. Juanita also remembered that when Victoria was in middle school she was part of a pre-college program where selected students were awarded a \$10,000 scholarship and given a mentor.

*Por ejemplo, ella empezó en middle school. Tuvo un mentor y se ganó una beca creo que 10 mil dólares. Pues ella con esos 10 mil dólares y su mentor que tenía, que todavía se visitan, ese mentor la llevó a conocer a París, también la llevó a Washington, la llevó a conocer un teatro de lujo, la llevó a conocer un restaurante de lujo en San Diego. Entonces mi hija ya había visto otro mundo, un mundo que nosotros no conocíamos, ella empezó a soñar con las cosas buenas de la vida. La intención de ese programa era de que los niños conocieran una vida diferente a la que han vivido de pobres, que ellos vieran que hay otro mundo y mucho mejor.*

(For example, she started in middle school. She had a mentor and had won a \$10,000 scholarship. Well with those \$10,000 her mentor, whom she still visits, took her to Paris, also to Washington, also to see a play at a fancy theatre, he also took her to a fancy



restaurant in San Diego. At that point, my daughter had seen another world, a world that we didn't know, she began dreaming of the good things in life. The intention of that program was for kids to learn about a different life than the one that poor people lived, that the kids see that there was a much better world.)

Victoria experienced a different world with the help of her mentor during her early academic career and learned how to be organized and stay on track with AVID during her high school career. However, these accomplishments were not achieved without familial disagreements, particularly with her father. Victoria's dad, Miguel, was not in favor of what Victoria was doing.

Victoria said,

I feel like with a lot of Mexican dads, they're the more strict parent. Maybe the scarier parent to go to when you ask for things. He was more serious and less emotional. I feel like, we couldn't just have a casual conversation. Everything always has to be serious all the time with my dad. And my mom was always the more approachable one.

Juanita also admitted that her husband, Miguel, is a very difficult person. He would constantly scold Juanita and tell her not to let their children go on fieldtrips because it worried him while they were gone. She said,

*Mi esposo siempre decía que no. Entonces por mi cuenta yo tenía que apoyar a mis hijos. "Mami, es que yo quiero ir a hacer esto y hacer lo otro." Y pues entonces el papá siempre dijo que no, si nos dejamos guiar por él, mis hijos no hubieran ido a ningún lado. No hubieran hecho lo que están haciendo. Yo sé que él se siente orgulloso, yo sé que le halagan sus hijos, pero de un principio él no los hubiera dejado ir. Y yo estaba de: "Sí, sí van a ir y sí van a ir." Ella quiere estudiar, pero me daba pendiente. Sí, a mí también me daba pendiente pero yo sé lo que Victoria es y se iba a portar bien.*

(My husband would always say no. So, I had to support my kids through my own accord. "Mommy I want to go here and do this and that." And the dad always said no. If we would have listened to him my kids would have never done anything. They wouldn't have done what they are currently doing. I know that he's proud now and he's flattered by his kids, but he would have never let them go. And I would say, "Yes, they are going, yes they are going." She wanted to study, but I was worried. Yes, I was worried too, but I knew what Victoria was and I knew she would behave.)

Juanita also recalls her husband threatening her on several occasions that if anything happened to their children while they were away on a field trip, he would hold her responsible. Juanita

explained that she would sign her kids' permission slips and let them go to wherever the school or Victoria's mentor was willing to take her, but that she never stopped praying until they returned safely back home.

Juanita was willing to do anything for Victoria, but it was not always easy. Victoria remembers that when she was in elementary school her mom forbade her from speaking English in the classroom. Juanita was worried that the school would switch Victoria from her Spanish speaking classroom to an English one and then Juanita would not be able to communicate with Victoria's teachers. Eventually Victoria's teacher did switch her, and Victoria had to serve as a translator for her mom and teachers. Victoria said she did not care though, because her mom "was probably one of the most involved [parents], regardless of the language barrier." Victoria also remembers that her mother was her "personal chauffeur," and although Juanita did not learn how to drive until later in life, it did not stop Juanita from doing absolutely everything she could to help her kids, whether it be taking them lunch, picking up school supplies, or taking them to their extracurricular activities. Victoria also vividly remembered a math field trip that she almost missed due to head lice. Victoria had been sent home by the school nurse and directed not to come back to school until the lice had been removed. When Juanita picked her up at school, Victoria explained in tears that if the lice were not removed that day, she would not be able to go on the math field trip the next day. Victoria says that her mom spent the rest of that day and night removing every last nit so Victoria could go on her field trip. Victoria smiled and said, "It's like my mom was just willing to do anything."

Victoria also said that Juanita never insisted she apply to any particular college or university. On the contrary, Victoria said that her mom "always gave me the freedom to really do what I wanted to do academically. She was like, 'Yeah, go wherever you wanna go.' You

know?” Victoria eventually applied to 11 schools located all over the United States. She told her parents she was applying out of state ‘just to see if I can get in, I won’t really go there.’”

However, once she found out she had been waitlisted at Stanford University, her dream school, Victoria had no other choice but to start exploring her other options. When she received the acceptance letter from Clinton University, a top tier Ivy League institution on the East Coast, and realized she would not have to pay anything to attend, the idea of going out of state was no longer so far-fetched. Juanita said, “*Nuestras finanzas aquí en la casa siempre han sido muy limitadas y difíciles*” (Our finances here at home have always been very limited and difficult). Nevertheless, that did not stop Juanita from pulling out her credit card and buying three plane tickets for Victoria, Elizabeth, and her to visit Clinton University to see if it was a good fit for Victoria. Juanita told Victoria, “*Pues ándale, hija. Y agarro mi tarjeta de crédito y aunque me endeude pagando los boletos, nos fuimos*” (Well let’s go Victoria. And I got my credit card, and even though I went into debt paying for those tickets, we left). Victoria says that her dad did not approve of her leaving for college and kept saying “stay in Los Angeles.” Victoria admitted,

My dad was actually mad when I decided to go to Clinton University because I had gotten into a bunch of the UC’s. He just wanted me to go to UCLA. He’s like, “You’re being dumb. Why are you going to go to the other side of the country when you can just go there and just live at home?”

The truth was that Victoria had fallen in love with Clinton University when her mom and sister had taken her to visit, and even Juanita had mentally accepted that her daughter was going to leave. When asked if Juanita had been the one who convinced her husband to let Victoria go to Clinton University she responded with, “*Claro, pero ni yo sé cómo lo convencí*” (Of course, but I don’t even know how I did it). Once Victoria left, Juanita said the transition was very difficult for her. She recalled, “*No tiene idea lo que yo lloré, pero ella quería irse lejos porque su papá fue muy duro. Su papá siempre fue muy regañón, muy estricto, muy pesado y ella quería irse*

*donde su papá no estuviera*” (You have no idea how much I cried, but she wanted to leave and go far away because her dad was very hard on her. Her dad was always scolding her, very strict, very heavy with her and she wanted to leave to a place where her dad would not be).

Juanita understood that Victoria was not leaving to get away from her, but more so her dad. Juanita also said that although she has been married for 31 years, it has not always been a happy marriage. Juanita’s oldest daughter, Elizabeth, has even suggested that her mom get a divorce, but Juanita said she would never consider that because Victoria and Sebastian are still in college. Juanita said that she understands why her daughters do not want to be like her, that they saw how much she suffered with their dad and saw *“como su papá me trataba porque estaba gordita, porque me puse fea, y no quería llevarme a ningún lado porque se avergonzaba de mí”* (how their dad treated me because I was overweight, because I got ugly, and he didn’t want to take me anywhere because he was embarrassed of me).

Victoria said leaving for college was also very difficult for her. She said that even though El Monte was not the ideal place to grow up in she was accustomed to her community and got homesick her first semester. Regarding her initial experience at Clinton University Victoria said,

I don’t think I saw even one Latino student the first semester. I know there’s supposed to be Latino students here, but I never saw any. I don’t know what it was...I just saw a bunch of White students and Black students. But like, I didn’t feel like there was other students that had that same background as me. So, I felt like they couldn’t relate to me. I’m like, “I’m from El Monte.”

Victoria also said that she would call home a lot and was extremely homesick but

didn’t want to admit it to my parents... because I didn’t want them to worry. So, every time I would like talk to them I’d be like, “Yeah, everything is great.” But then I’d hang up and think, “I wanna go home!”

Juanita says that she’s proud of all her children, but there were a few times that she felt Victoria was ungrateful. *“Yo sé que no tengo una educación formal, pero siento que de todos*

*modos merezco respeto*” (I know I don’t have a formal education, but I believe I also deserve to be respected). When asked what she was referring to, Juanita started crying and said that even though she does not speak or understand English, she knows that Victoria never referenced her father or her during her valedictorian speech in high school.

*Yo nunca escuché que dijera gracias a mis papás. No lo oí. Y yo oí a otros niños que sí dijeron “gracias a mis papás.” Y en esa parte sí me sentí triste porque si alguien hizo algo por Victoria, fui yo siempre, la que estaba conectada con todo, y aunque no entiendo inglés yo sé que nunca dijo gracias a mis papás...o mi mama.*

(I never heard her say thank you to my parents. I didn’t hear it. I heard other kids say, “thank you to my parents.” And in that part, I felt sad because if anyone did something for Victoria, it was always me, the one who was connected with everything, and even though I don’t understand English I know that she never said thank you to my parents... or my mom.)

When Juanita eventually wiped away her tears she said that up until recently she did not know how brave she was. She explained, *“Mire este es mi negocio y yo lo he hecho sola, mi esposo no me ha dado ni un dólar para hacer mi negocio”* (Look, this is my business and I did it all by myself, my husband never gave me even a dollar to start my business). Juanita no longer makes *recuerdos*; instead she owns a fitness studio and nutrition bar. She is also a top tier consultant for Herbalife. She showed a photo of what she looked like a few years ago and said she had lost over 100 pounds on Herbalife and was now trying to help others do the same. Before leaving, she reemphasized how proud she was of her kids’ accomplishments, but at that point I could not help but feel proud of her and her own accomplishments.

### **Victoria and Juanita: Reflection, Advice, Suggestions, and Ideas to Further Support First-Generation Latina College Graduate Success**

Juanita acknowledged that many individuals in Latino/a communities are not involved in the educational endeavors of their children, but this does not need to be the case. She said that a lot of school workshops are in English, which makes it difficult for Spanish-speaking parents to

understand. Juanita said that it is important for schools and communities to help Latino/a families embrace and help develop their child's native language with bilingual and dual immersion programs. *"Cuando los niños se desarrollan en su idioma natal, no solo hablar, pero también leer y escribir, los niños pueden obtener más oportunidades en la vida"* (When the native language of kids is developed, not only speaking but also reading and writing, kids are able to obtain better opportunities in life). She also explained that it is important to expose children from low-income communities like El Monte to different career and educational options. Juanita said that a lot of Latino/a families tend to be satisfied with simply graduating from high school, but that is not enough now. As a parent with three children who have obtained, or are in the process of obtaining, a college degree, Juanita says that it is everyone's responsibility to *"darles una visión y meterles sueños en el cerebro desde chiquitos para avanzar"* (give them a vision and have them dream since they are young so they can advance). She described mindful meditation techniques for young children along with mentors and career coaches. Juanita said that everyone needs to be involved for the well-being of all children, regardless of where they are from.

Victoria agrees with her mother and explained that had it not been for her elementary and middle school teachers showing her that there was more to life than El Monte, she most likely would not have obtained a higher education.

I always had teachers who really motivated me. Many of them would invest their own money to buy prizes for the class if we did well. My teachers were really my biggest influence because they knew and understood our community and would do things for us knowing that many of our parents could not. They really tried to get to know us and made an effort to get to know our families as well. They weren't just trying to log in their hours, they really cared about us and were trying to build relationships with us.

Victoria says that she felt many of her teachers wanted to get to know everything about her, not just what she did or did not do in the classroom. She said felt that caring classroom teachers and

mentors were what helped her the most while growing up. She said she still talks to her mentor from middle school and credits him for convincing her to not be afraid to apply to colleges out of state. She says that every time she met with him he would remind her that she had the capacity to study at a good school and tell her, “You have to go for it!” Besides taking Victoria to Europe and Washington, DC, her mentor also took her to various plays and college visits throughout California. She said “Obviously, my parents did not have money for things like that so I was lucky I got to experience it with my mentor. These experiences were truly instrumental in my life and what I eventually did.”

Both Victoria and Juanita acknowledge that children, especially those who live in communities like El Monte, need to see that an outside world exists. Juanita explained that children and families should be shown how to dream and set goals while also being exposed to different career options. Victoria agrees with her mother and said that had it not been for those influential individuals in her life, both teachers and mentors, she would not have known what she was capable of academically. According to both Victoria and Juanita, first-generation students and families need extra academic support, and if provided with that support, they can achieve great outcomes.

### **Narrative 3: Olivia and Daniela**

Olivia explained she is not the type of person who asks for attention, but admitted that sometimes as the “middle child” she longs for it. She knows that her parents want the best for her, but said this was difficult considering that she had to move a lot when things got “tough.” There were several times during a given school year where Olivia had to move at least three times, making it hard for her to adapt or find stability in any school setting. Nevertheless, regardless of her situation, she has always been passionate about acquiring a higher education.

Olivia said that she always knew “there was more to the world than what El Monte offered.” She explained that she always knew her escape would be school because she was “actually pretty good at it.”

<p><b>Narrative Summary:</b> The following narrative describes the educational journey of Olivia through her own perspective and her mother, Daniela’s perspective. Olivia explains that she always did well in school but longed for someone to help her who had a better understanding of how to obtain a higher education. Olivia excelled during her undergraduate career, but it was not without struggle. She currently lives at home and works as a legal assistant as she gets ready to apply for law school</p> <p><b>Findings Included in Narrative:</b> <i>Stories of Struggle</i> (unstable home life), <i>Unconditional Support</i> (attending workshops at school, supportive extended family, and financial support), <i>Additional Academic Support Outside the Family</i> (mentors, pre-college programs, field trips, and clubs), <i>College Persistence</i> (homesickness and guilt), and <i>They Just Don’t Get It</i> (gender stereotypes).</p>	
<p><b>Olivia (College Graduate)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Age:</b> 24 years old</li> <li>• <b>Nationality:</b> US Citizen</li> <li>• <b>Edu. Level:</b> BA from UC Northern Heights located in Northern California.</li> <li>• <b>Major:</b> Legal Studies and Sociology</li> <li>• <b>Rel. Status:</b> Single</li> <li>• <b>Current Occupation:</b> Personal injury legal assistant</li> <li>• Lived away from home during college and currently lives at home.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Daniela (Mom)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Age:</b> 47 Years Old</li> <li>• <b>Nationality:</b> Guerrero, Mexico</li> <li>• <b>Edu. Level:</b> High School/Some College</li> <li>• <b>Rel. Status:</b> Domestic partner for 26 years</li> <li>• <b>Occupation:</b> Factory Worker/Garment Industry</li> <li>• <b>Dad Edu. Level:</b> Third Grade</li> </ul>

Figure 3. Summary and demographic data for Olivia and Daniela.

Olivia explained that her mother, Daniela, has always been the more involved parent by making sure her kids were always ready for school and always available for school events. Olivia explained that her mom emphasized that she did not want her kids making the same mistakes she had made while growing up in Mexico. Olivia also admitted that her mom has “always been hard on us...she’s the tough love kind of mom. Doesn’t really say I love you, doesn’t really say I’m proud of you.” However, regardless of her tough love attitude, Olivia claimed her mom was always supportive and trusted the academic choices she made.



Daniela was born and raised in Guerrero, Mexico. She is the youngest of 13 brothers and sisters. Daniela dreamt of one day becoming a teacher and had the opportunity to go on to college in Mexico, but unfortunately never finished her degree because she said she lacked the familial support. Daniela said, “*Mi mama no creyó en mí. Ella dijo que un día me iba a casar y no iba a terminar nada*” (My mom didn’t believe in me. She said one day I was going to get married and not finish anything). Daniela said that she did not want her children to be like her, meaning not finish school, so she always encouraged them to obtain a higher education.

*Pues yo les dije que yo no quería que pasaran por lo que yo pasé. Que yo iba a respetar lo que ellos quisieran estudiar, o sea, que yo los iba a dejar ser porque yo no quería que el día de mañana ellos vivieran frustrados.*

(I told them that I didn’t want them to go through what I had gone through. That I was going to respect what they wanted to study, that is, that I was going to let them be because I didn’t want them to one day be frustrated.)

Daniela also explained that she tried to lead by example, a negative example, that is. She wanted her children to see how overworked she and her partner were so that her children could study and become something more in life. She said she wanted a good future for her children, so they could live well and not have to work in badly ventilated factories like she has for the past 23 years. This is why she always told her children to study so they could have a better future for themselves and their future families. Daniela did not want her children “*que sufrieran lo que nosotros hemos sufrido*” (to suffer what we have suffered).

Olivia knows that her mom did what she could to help, but at times she felt that it was almost superficial. Olivia explained,

Behind the scenes my parents weren’t involved. Behind the scenes, they didn’t know what was going on. They never went to school in the States and even though they have been here for 20 plus years they still haven’t learned English. But I can’t blame them, when would they even have time to learn English? They work all day and have a family they need to provide for.

Olivia says that although her mom prided herself in being at every single assembly, parent conference, and open house, her support for her was at the most surface level. She explained that she does not want to sound ungrateful because her mom did have to sacrifice a lot to attend these school meetings, but Olivia wanted more. “It might be a culture thing,” said Olivia. She said that she always hears about Asian parents being tough on their kids, but Olivia’s parents were always “like, ‘Just do your best.’” As Olivia processed what she was saying she said, “I guess that’s why I never hated school. There was never an intense pressure to be the best, but I think it would have been nice to have someone who had gone through the same thing help guide me.” Daniela, on the other hand, explained that she tried to be involved with Olivia’s academic career and would always ask for permission to leave work so she could attend meetings and assemblies. Daniela said she still has all the certificates she earned through the parent workshop courses she attended. Daniela said Olivia’s school would host a series of parent workshops that ranged in topics from “How to Help Your Child with Homework” to “How to Help Your Child Get into College.”

Daniela explained,

*Yo me salía de trabajar e iba corriendo a la clase para no faltar. Yo siempre iba a sus juntas y hasta tengo diplomas que me daban. La escuela también hacía ceremonias para los papás que terminaban los cursos.*

(I would leave work and go running to the workshop so I would not be late. I always went to the meetings and even have the certificates I would earn. The school would even have a ceremony for the parents who finished the course.)

Although Olivia repeatedly said that she wished her mom could have helped her more, she did acknowledge that she always felt supported. “Looking back, I guess I always was supported and maybe some other kids don’t get that. It was definitely encouraging that my mom was always encouraging me to pursue my dreams, something I guess I have taken for granted,” said Olivia.

Olivia did not have a specific mentor while growing up, but she explained that she did have several teachers she admired who helped her during elementary school and high school. For example, in elementary school Olivia was selected as student of the year, and as a prize her teacher took her to Disneyland for the first time. This teacher also gave Olivia a notebook that she still cherishes to this day. In addition, during high school, Olivia claims that had it not been for her World History teacher she would have never been introduced to any AP (Advanced Placement) courses or met other college bound students who also ultimately helped her apply to and go on to a 4-year university. Olivia had done well in World History her sophomore year and her teacher helped her get into AP US History, an advanced junior level course. Olivia said that her teacher role-played with her how she was going to ask her counselor to place her in the upper level course. Olivia said he even told her how to respond if her counselor was hesitant about placing her in the more difficult course. Olivia explained that had it not been for that particular teacher she would not have taken AP U.S. History nor AP English Language her junior year in high school. Olivia also said that although a lot of students did not like the AP English Language course because the teacher was challenging, Olivia said it was one of her favorite classes. She said that even though she had transferred into the class from a regular English course, her teacher “really saw potential in me.” Olivia was one of the few students who earned an A in the course and passed the AP test at the end of the school year.

Besides having a few motivational teachers Olivia was also involved in several clubs on campus and did a lot of community service. She said she actively participated in five organizations at her high school and did community service every weekend. Daniela shared that Olivia’s father would take her to various walks and runs, sometimes at 5 o’clock in the morning,

for Olivia to volunteer with her service group. Daniela also said that Olivia was always punctual to all her events and even if there was rain and lightning Olivia would still make sure to go.

*Los últimos dos años casi no la veía porque ella estaba muy involucrada en su escuela. Yo pienso que todo esto le ayudó a prepararse para ir a la universidad porque a ella le gustaba ayudar y eso la hizo más responsable.*

(The last 2 years of high school I hardly ever saw her because she was really involved with school. I believe that all that helped prepare her for college because she really liked to help and it made her more responsible.)

Olivia also took advantage of a pre-college program that her school offered, GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), a group that provided after school tutoring, field trips, and college application support. Olivia explained that she was able to visit several colleges and universities through the program. Olivia also said that had it not been for GEAR-UP, she would have never visited UC Northern Heights where she eventually ended up being accepted and attending. Olivia applied to four UCs; unfortunately only UC Northern Heights accepted her, so she did not have many options in terms of where she could attend. Olivia said she would have preferred a school closer to home, but was happy she had visited UC Northern Heights before accepting their offer and knew she would be content with her choice. When asked about how she felt about Olivia leaving Daniela said, *“Yo siempre la he apoyado en lo que ella quería. Yo siempre le dije que la iba a apoyar y si ella se sentía segura de estudiar en UC Northern Heights, por mí estaba bien”* (I have always supported her in whatever she wanted. I always told her that I would support her and if she felt sure about studying at UC Northern Heights, I was fine with that). Nevertheless, the transition was a lot harder for Daniela than she had expected.

Daniela explained that she had never been away from Olivia and did not think she would be as sad as she was when Olivia left. Daniela also revealed that she was somewhat relieved that

at least Olivia went to a school in California since she cannot travel outside California due to her immigration status. “*Yo no tengo papeles, y me da miedo salir*” (I don’t have papers and I am afraid to leave), said Daniela. Olivia, on the other hand, said she was a bit homesick but knew that “was a natural thing.” Olivia also explained, “I felt sad for [my family] but I was excited, really excited. I knew that if they had supported me all this time, they would be fine.” Daniela on the other hand admitted that she would cry a lot but would see that Olivia was:

*Contenta y emocionada porque ya iba ser libre. Pero para mí sí fue muy difícil desprenderme yo me sentía triste y pensaba: si ya había comido, qué estaría haciendo. Y cada que iba a comer yo me acordaba de ella y si tendría hambre.*

(Happy and excited because she was going to be free. But it was very difficult for me to let go I felt sad and would wonder: if she had eaten, or what could she be doing. And every time I would eat I would think of her and wonder if she was hungry.)

Olivia was Daniela’s extended family’s pride and joy, but when she left to college this image and pride became somewhat tarnished according to Daniela.

Daniela is the youngest of 13 brothers and sisters and has a very positive relationship with her siblings and their families. Everyone was extremely proud of Olivia being accepted to UC Northern Heights and doing so well academically, especially her first year when she earned a 4.0 GPA, despite living more than 8 hours away from home. Olivia said she loved UC Northern Heights and was able to make a lot of new friends, fall in love with a new boyfriend, and join a sorority. Her junior year she even had the opportunity to study abroad. Daniela said that everyone was proud of Olivia, but that she felt betrayed when she discovered over social media that Olivia had a boyfriend and had never said anything about it during their daily phone calls. Daniela said, “*no lo podía creer, ella era mi niña*” (I couldn’t believe it, she was my little girl). Daniela explained that she was not upset simply because Olivia had a boyfriend, but more so because she never told her and had to find out through social media. In addition, a few months

later, Daniela also found out that Olivia was not just dating this young boy but had a much more serious and intimate relationship with him. Daniela said that discovering this *“me dolió. Al principio no lo podía creer, pero tuve que aceptarlo”* (hurt me. At first I couldn't believe it, but I had to accept it). Daniela said that she never told anyone about what she had discovered about Olivia's relationship, but felt betrayed because she had sacrificed a lot to help Olivia.

Daniela said that Olivia has always been very thrifty and never asks for much, but there were several occasions while Olivia was at UC Northern Heights where Daniela had to help her financially. Olivia said that after her first year, she decided to stay at UC Northern Heights over the summer and take a few extra classes, but her financial aid package did not come through and she had to pay for her housing out of pocket. Olivia said, “I was desperate and looking for a job but could not find anything and rent out there is really expensive. So, my mom, who knows where she got the money from, but she's the one who helped me.” Daniela works in the garment industry and although it is a difficult job due to the poor working conditions, she says that she is comfortable because the owners treat her well. Daniela also said there were various occasions when she had to help Olivia financially and that Olivia's dad could not provide that support because he had several other expenses. Daniela said that when Olivia joined Kappa Delta Mu, she helped Olivia pay the \$900 membership fee. In addition, there were several other times when Olivia would call and simply ask for \$30 here and there for other miscellaneous expenses. When Daniela shared this information, she started crying and said she could not believe that her little girl was simply asking for \$30, which to her was nothing. *“Yo no le mandaba sólo 30, le mandaba 100 ó 150. O sea, ella bien humilde. No es por nada, pero es bien humilde”* (I would not send her only \$30, I would send her \$100 or \$150. It's not for nothing, but she is very humble”).

Although Daniela felt somewhat betrayed after finding out about Olivia and her boyfriend, it did not stop her from helping. Before Olivia left for Europe to study abroad, Daniela and her sisters made a *kermes* (a celebration where food and drinks are sold usually for a cause) to raise money for Olivia's trip. Daniela proudly said that although she was a little embarrassed to host such an event, she was later happy to see that they had raised over \$2,000 for Olivia's trip. Besides the *kermes*, Daniela also said she ran several *cundinas* (a community credit and savings tool that is used to make a major purchase) in order to pay for the expenses associated with Olivia's graduation.

*Por ejemplo, cuando se graduó Olivia... con las cundinas fue con lo que se pagó el viaje. Yo más o menos agarraba un número que me saliera cuando iba a ser su graduación y ya con eso pagaba: que el hotel, que para el viaje, que para la gasolina, que para ir a un restaurante, que para ayudarle a comprar una ropa nueva para que fuera presentable. Pero me criticaban mi esposo y también ella. Pero ellos no saben el esfuerzo que yo hago cada semana dando y dando.*

(For example, when Olivia was going to graduate...with the *cundinas* I was able to pay for the trip. I would more or less get a number where I would get my share that was near her graduation and with that I would be able to pay for the hotel, trip, gas, go eat at a restaurant, buy Olivia new clothes so she could be presentable. But everyone would criticize me like my husband and Olivia. But they never knew the effort that I would make week after week, giving and giving.)

Olivia said that she loved the time she spent at UC Northern Heights and did exceptionally well; however it was not without guilt. Olivia said that she knew her parents were having problems back at home and "felt sad mainly because I wasn't there to help them through it." Olivia said that sometimes she would dread talking to her younger sister on the phone because she would tell her about all the problems their parents were going through at home.

I felt guilty because I was really happy at UC Northern Heights. I mean, I had met someone and I fell in love, and I was just really happy and having to listen to my sister tell me that my family was struggling.... I just felt bad especially because I was having such a great time.

Daniela confirmed that she and her partner were having problems at home, but these problems had begun long before Olivia had left for college. Daniela explained that she and her husband have been having problems for over 15 years now.

*Pues, él y yo no estamos muy bien que digamos. Si yo he seguido aquí es por mis hijos porque él me fue infiel y de esa infidelidad hubieron consecuencias. Él tuvo una hija y esa hija está muy mal.*

(He and I are, let's say, not doing well. If I have stayed with him it's because of our kids because he was unfaithful to me and from that infidelity there were consequences. He had a daughter and that daughter is doing very badly.)

Olivia knows that her half-sister is not doing well and is constantly in and out of foster homes and is sad that this situation has made her mom a "bitter and angry person." She acknowledges that her mom has been strong in trying to deal with these issues, but does not necessarily agree that she handled them well to begin with. Olivia insinuated that her mom should have left her dad a long time ago, especially since they are not legally married.

Daniela explained that she is just waiting for Olivia to go to law school so she can go back to Mexico. Daniela tells Olivia that she needs to be...

*Perseverante para seguir adelante. Le digo que siga porque yo ya me cansé de estar en este país, de trabajar, trabajar, y trabajar. Que yo quiero que ella terminé lo que tiene que terminar, para poderme ir y dejarla con una carrera.*

(Perseverant to move forward. I tell her to carry on because I am tired of being in this country, of working, working, and working. That I want her to finish what she needs to finish so I can leave and she has a career.)

Olivia knows that her mom has been through a lot in life not just with her partner, but in general. "I don't think she's happy...she's just not happy."

Olivia is currently living back in El Monte with both her parents and siblings. She works as a personal injury legal assistant and is studying to take the LSATs so she can apply to and attend law school. She said, "I want to help underprivileged people. Like the ones in my



community who need the help, but perhaps can't afford it. I really want to be able to give back to my community."

### **Olivia and Daniela: Reflection, Advice, Suggestions, and Ideas to Further Support First-Generation Latina College Graduate Success**

As Daniela reflected on her daughter's educational journey she said she could not help but feel sad. As an undocumented immigrant, she said she has to work twice as hard as anyone else. Daniela also explained that as much as she wanted to help Olivia and her two other kids get ahead, sometimes it was not possible because of her work and family obligations.

*Lo que sucede es que vivimos en un país donde tenemos que trabajar y si no trabajamos no vamos a poder pagar los billes, la comida, y la renta. La realidad es que muchos papás, como yo, no tenemos esa educación no somos profesionales y tenemos que trabajar más de los que son profesionales para llevar el pan a nuestro hogar. ¡Nosotros tenemos que trabajar! Nosotros pasamos casi todo el día en trabajo, más horas que es lo normal. Es decir que ya cuando llegamos a la casa estamos cansados y tenemos que hacer la cena y averiguar que vamos a llevar para lonche el día siguiente y también ayudarles a nuestros hijos chiquitos con las tareas.*

(What happens is that we live in a country where we must work and if we don't work we can't pay our bills, our food, or our rent. The reality is that parents, like me, we don't have an education we are not professionals and have to work more than those who are professionals so we can take bread to our home. We must work! We spend most of the day at work, more than the normal amount. It's to say that when we get home we are tired and must make dinner and figure out what we are going to take for lunch the next day and help our little ones with homework.)

Daniela also said that most of the time the workshops offered at schools are not conducive to the lives of many immigrant families. She said that school districts and local schools should consider that many of the families in low-income communities get out of work late and would be more likely to go to a workshop later in the evening or the weekend. She also mentioned that as a woman who lives with a *machista* partner, like many other Latina women, a lot of the responsibility in terms of helping their children get ahead falls on the woman. She said that all moms want their children to get ahead, she just wishes the workshop offerings were more

favorable to her work schedule and family obligations, in addition to being conducted in Spanish. She said that when she would attend workshops in the past she really enjoyed them because they motivated her to be a better mother.

*Todos los talleres eran en español y a mí no me gustaba faltar. A mí me gustaba ir a los talleres porque nos enseñaban como debíamos hablarles a nuestros hijos para poder motivarlos y que fueran a la universidad.*

(All the workshops were in Spanish and I didn't like to miss any. I liked going to the workshops because they would teach us how to speak with our children to better motivate them so they can go to college.)

Daniela said that based on her personal experience, in terms of trying to help Olivia get ahead, she found the school workshops the most helpful and informative. Daniela suggested that schools and districts continue helping parents understand the process of what it takes to obtain a higher education.

Olivia also said that trying to explain or translate everything to her parents while growing up was tedious and sometimes would not even bother doing it. She said that she hoped schools and districts would focus on uplifting Latino/a communities in ways that they understand and can relate to. For example,

It's more difficult with parents who don't speak English. My parents wanted to help me, but obviously couldn't help me because they couldn't speak the language. Maybe if there were more bilingual programs for parents, or even teachers who better understood where we are coming from and perhaps engage with Spanish speaking parents, families would be better able to help their children succeed.

Olivia also explained that there needs to be a relationship between schools and families, but trying to create those exchanges would be more successful if teachers and school districts had a better understanding of where these families come from. Olivia said that many of the families in communities like El Monte do not have the resources or knowledge to help their children get

ahead, but teachers and schools do. For instance, Olivia credits a large part of her academic success to the teachers who believed in her and helped her apply to and attend college. She said,

If it wasn't for certain teachers, I wouldn't have gotten into the classes that I needed to get into college. I realized that when I transferred over to the more advanced classes from the regular classes the students were a lot more pampered. What I mean is that teachers and counselors made sure they are kept on track in terms of going to and applying to college, whereas the regular level classes were not being told about what you had to do to get into college. Or least it wasn't pushed as much as in the AP classes. With the regular classes the kids weren't getting the same treatment. There was totally a difference in terms of expectations and motivation in the higher-level classes.

Olivia explained that her teachers helped her get ahead and she trusted them because they believed in her and her capabilities. Based on her experience, she says that the only missing link in helping others succeed is helping build positive relationships between schools and families.

Both Daniela and Olivia agree that if schools and districts work together with the families of their community, then they can better support first-generation students acquire a higher education. Daniela and Olivia also explain that family workshops and meetings at school need to be conducive to the needs of the community. They should be held in Spanish and during times when families are not working. Together, according Daniela and Olivia, schools and families can really help first-generation students acquire a higher education.

#### **Narrative 4: Jessica and Maria**

Jessica said that her world revolves around her family and they are one of the main reasons why she has always strived to obtain a higher education. Like many other first-generation college bound Latinas, Jessica explained that her parents also immigrated to the United States in hopes of obtaining a better life than in their home country of Mexico.

Jessica is the oldest daughter of Maria and Juan, who have been together for 23 years and have three daughters who were all raised in El Monte. Jessica said that from a young age her parents always instilled in her the idea that one day she would go on to college. Jessica says that

although her parents did not really know what the college application process entailed, they knew it was an option. Jessica also says that she felt obligated to one day pay her parents back for all the sacrifices they made in coming to this country and working so hard. Jessica explained, “I couldn’t just be the oldest and not help out my family financially. I had to bring in some income and the only way I would be able to do that is if I went to college.” When Jessica said this, she laughed and said, “Obviously, now that I have graduated I realize it’s a lot more difficult than that, but it’s my way of giving back one day.”

<p><b>Narrative Summary:</b> While growing up and living at home Jessica witnessed her mother’s struggles with <i>machismo</i> and lack of opportunities. Consequently, Jessica realized she needed to obtain a higher education in order to have more options in life. Once Jessica explained and showed her mother, Maria, why she was so involved in extracurricular activities Maria was more supportive and helped Jessica prepare to attend her dream college. The following narrative describes Jessica’s academic journey and the support her mother, Maria, provided.</p> <p><b>Findings Included in Narrative:</b> <i>Stories of Struggle</i> (providing what her mother did not have), <i>Unconditional Support</i> (providing lunch, fixing uniform, buying school supplies, praying for daughter’s success, and words of wisdom,), <i>Additional Academic Support Outside the Family</i> (career counselor and extracurricular activities), <i>College Persistence</i> (difficult transition and wanting to drop out), and <i>They Just Don’t Get It</i> (gender stereotypes and language barriers).</p>	
<p><b>Jessica (College Graduate)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Age:</b> 22 years old</li> <li>• <b>Nationality:</b> US Citizen</li> <li>• <b>Edu. Level:</b> BA from University of California Beachfront</li> <li>• <b>Major:</b> Sociology &amp; Spanish: Community &amp; Culture</li> <li>• <b>Rel. Status:</b> Single</li> <li>• <b>Current Occupation:</b> Teacher’s Aide and MA Student</li> <li>• Lived away from home during college and currently lives at home.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Maria (Mom)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Age:</b> 50 Years Old</li> <li>• <b>Nationality:</b> Michoacán, Mexico</li> <li>• <b>Edu. Level:</b> High School Graduate/<i>Preparatoria</i> (12<sup>th</sup> Grade)</li> <li>• <b>Rel. Status:</b> Married for 23 years</li> <li>• <b>Occupation:</b> Babysitter and Homemaker</li> <li>• <b>Dad Edu. Level:</b> High School Graduate/<i>Preparatoria</i> (12<sup>th</sup> Grade)</li> </ul>

Figure 4. Summary and demographic data for Jessica and Maria.

Maria and Juan both immigrated, without proper documentation, from Central Mexico and have not been able to visit family and friends back in Mexico since arriving in the United

States. They also both completed *la preparatoria* in Mexico, which is the equivalent of a high school diploma. Maria smiled as she fondly remembered her hometown and said,

*En mis tiempos no estaba como ahora. Ahora, está un poco pervertido. En el tiempo que yo estuve estudiando yo nunca conocí la droga y jamás escuché de cosas que se escuchan aquí. Por eso ahora de madre le da a uno temor que sus hijas anden o se vayan a otro lugar. ¿Pero qué puede hacer uno más que encomendarlas a Dios?*

(In my time, it was not like it is now. It's a bit more deviant now. When I was studying I never knew of drugs and never heard of the things you hear today. That is why now as a mother it sometimes scares us that our daughters go somewhere else. But what can we do besides entrust them with God?)

Although Maria, did not have the opportunity to obtain a higher education in Mexico or the U.S. because it was just too expensive, she explained that she constantly tried to push Jessica to make sure she did. Jessica said that her mother “was always in my business. I guess it was her way of pushing me.” Maria was one of the oldest in a family of 14 brothers and sisters and said she was proud of always helping her family. While finishing high school Maria said she also had a job that helped pay for her entire family’s food and would have to rush from school to work. She explained that if it had not been for her own mom always helping her, she would not have been able to handle such a hectic schedule.

*Mi mamá me tenía ya todo planchado, todo arreglado, los zapatos bien boleados, la comida y yo sólo llegaba rápido a bañarme a cambiarme y a comer a la carrera. Y pues cuando me casé y tuve mis tres hijas yo siempre tuve eso en la mente, que sí me ayudó mi madre, yo ayudaría a mis hijas para que también ellas salieran adelante.*

(My mom would have everything ironed and ready, my shoes polished and food ready. I would just quickly arrive, bathe, change, and eat in a hurry. When I got married and had my three girls, I always had that on my mind, that my mom helped me and I would help my daughters so they too could get ahead.)

Jessica said that she knew her mom always had the best intentions in terms of helping her, but sometimes “just didn’t get it.” Jessica explained she would get frustrated with her mom because she did not understand why she had to do the things she did with her extracurricular

activities or her advanced classes. “I would get mad sometimes and tell her ‘No you don’t understand.’ But I was her first kid. She didn’t know anything. She had never done it before so there was no one as a reference.” Jessica admitted that she had an even more difficult time when she was trying something new like community service. Jessica said that her mom did not understand why Jessica had to be at events so early or for so long when to Jessica, “it just made common sense.” At one point Jessica told her mom that if she did not believe her then she was welcome to go with her, which Maria did. Once Maria saw what her daughter was doing Jessica said it was easier for her mom to let her be more involved with school activities. At this point, Jessica also realized that she could not blame her mom for not knowing. Jessica said that it was her own fault that her mother did not understand because “I wasn’t allowing her to understand. I wasn’t giving her the opportunity to understand. I was not explaining it to her in a way she could understand.” Jessica said that when Maria saw everything Jessica was doing she even stopped asking her to do chores around the house so she could focus solely on her school work and extracurricular activities.

Jessica admitted that although her mom was not able to help her with her core subjects at school, especially since she did not speak the language, her mom helped her in other ways once she understood what she was doing. For example, Jessica participated in her school’s song team and had practice every day after school, sometimes having to spend up to 12 hours on any given day at school. Jessica said that her mom always made sure to bring her, and sometimes even the entire team, a warm meal so she could eat something during practice. Even though Maria does not drive and had to walk to Jessica’s school multiple times a day to drop things off, she said she would continue doing it as long as she was physically able to.

*Era la forma en la que yo le podía ayudar, porque yo no estoy preparada, yo no sé inglés pero con lo que yo podía ayudarle era con: llevándole comida a la escuela, preparando sus uniformes, y comprándole sus cosas para sus proyectos.*

(It was the way I could help her because I'm not educated, I don't know English but what I could help her with was taking food to her school, washing her uniform, and buying her the materials she needed for her projects.)

Jessica said that all these gestures of support from her mother made her life a lot easier so she could focus solely on her academics.

Maria also said that she tried to teach her daughters to always be on time, never have an empty stomach, and always ask questions. She wanted Jessica to be confident and put her pride aside if necessary to learn as much as possible. For example, "*Tú siempre tienes que tratar, y tratar, y tratar. Si te caes, te levantas. Y si no puedes, pide ayuda pero no te quedes ahí sin decir nada porque es peor*" (You always need to try, try, and try. If you fall, get up. If you can't, ask for help but never stay there without saying anything because that is the worst). At one point Jessica was having a really hard time with calculus and Maria hired a tutor to go to their home and help Jessica one-on-one. When asked how much she paid for this tutor, Maria said, "*Le di 35 dólares. Yo estaba muy agradecida porque Jessica empezó a entender. La tutora me dijo que le hablara cuando Jessica necesitara más ayuda y le volvimos a hablar. Y le pague otra vez 35 dólares*" (I gave her 35 dollars. I was very grateful because Jessica was beginning to understand. The tutor told me that I could call her again when Jessica needed more help so we called her again and I paid her 35 dollars again).

When asked how much she earned with her babysitting job Maria said she earned \$20 a day. Maria explained that she is a babysitter and has been doing it for a long time to earn extra money. She said her husband Juan takes care of the household expenses but, "*Pobrecito de mi esposo que trabaja mucho son muchos gastos en la casa, con puras niñas y luego: las niñas*

*somos muy caras*” (My poor husband works so much and has a lot of household expenses, with just women; and the girls we are just very expensive). Maria tries to be prudent and shops at thrift stores to save money. She also said that her neighbor sews clothes for her and her daughters, but things are just very expensive especially when trying to help her girls. In reference to overcoming financial burdens, Maria said, “*Aunque yo me quede sin nada, ellas tienen que tener lo que ocupan para sobresalir*” (Even if I end up with nothing, they should have what they need to succeed).

Jessica said that once her mom understood what she was doing at school and why it was so important to be involved, her home life was a lot easier. Nevertheless, Jessica also said that just because her mom understood did not mean her dad understood. Jessica said that even though her dad, Juan, is surrounded by women, it does not mean he is not a *machista*. Jessica explained that one of the main reasons her mom never tried to look for a job outside the home was because her dad would guilt her by saying, “How are you going to let other people raise your children?” Jessica said that sometimes “it goes down” at her house, meaning that she has had arguments with her father regarding his position on women. She explained that she does not think it is fair that just because women decide to work outside the home they can potentially be called “bad mothers.” Jessica said, “it’s not going to fly” about her dad telling her mom that she should stay home and cook versus going to adult school. Jessica said when she sees her dad saying these things, she tells him...

“No! Why, who said?” I’m a handful and I embrace it. I’m not sure if that’s a good thing or a bad thing. If my mom wants to get a job or go to school my dad should let her. I mean, if she fails at least she tried.

Maria also admitted that Jessica’s perspective on life is a little “*muy liberal*” (too liberal), which causes problems in their home. Maria said that sometimes she and Jessica get into



arguments because Jessica is disrespectful and says “*malas palabras*” (bad words). Maria also said that she reminds Jessica that while she is living at home she has to follow the rules of their home, but Jessica simply responds with “*¿Por qué haces todo lo que mi papá te dice? Tú no tienes que hacer lo que él te dice, no le tienes que pedir permiso*” (Why do you do everything my dad tells you to do? You don’t have to do what he tells you, you don’t need to ask for permission). Maria also says that Jessica is very adamant about telling her that she does not want to get married or ever have any kids because “*no quiere andar batallando*” (does not want to struggle).

Jessica said that one of her main motivations for going to and applying to college was always hearing her mom reminisce about what her life could have been if she had gotten a higher education and had a career. Jessica said she can still imagine her mom cleaning and sweeping while saying, “This is not what I envisioned for myself. I wanted to be in the professional world and working in an office while interacting with people, not stuck at home.” When Jessica would hear her mom say these things, she would think,

Oh snap! I don’t want to be doing housework 24-7. While I went to school my mom would stay and once I would come home the house was clean, there was food on table, and the laundry was done. It was great, I appreciated it. But do I see myself doing that? Would I want to see myself only being allowed that space, to function as a member of society? I was like, no, I can’t. I can’t do that. I want options. I want to be able to explore. I want to be able to do things in life.

Jessica was not involved in any pre-college programs, but said she took advantage of the career counselor in her high school career center. She said she practically lived there the first semester of her senior year while signing up for exams, filling out college applications, and submitting her FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). She explained that the only person who really helped her was Mr. Belleview, the career counselor, because she had no idea what she was doing. “He would sit down with me and help me fill out every box on every

application. I don't think he knows just how big of a role he played in helping me go to college," Jessica said.

Maria said that while Jessica was growing up she always told her that she wanted to go far away to college. So, when Maria saw Jessica on her computer applying to various colleges and universities would remind her to apply to universities "*lejos. A las más lejos donde ya no nos puedas ver*" (far away. The furthest ones where Jessica would no longer have to see her family). Jessica also said, "I couldn't wait till I was 18 so I could go super super far away for college." However, once it was time to decide where to attend college Jessica said that she was not so sure anymore. Jessica applied to 11 colleges and universities all located in California. The farthest school to which she applied, and to which she was accepted, was 8 hours away from her family. Maria said that she did not try to influence Jessica's decision, but had secretly made a pledge with God and started fasting on Friday's so Jessica could get into UC Beachfront, Jessica's dream school. Eventually Jessica did get accepted to UC Beachfront and decided to attend, but not without Maria asking her if she was sure of her decision. Jessica said that although she had previously thought she wanted to go "super super far away," decided that it was better to be closer to home. When asked why, Jessica said, "The food sealed the deal," meaning that if she stayed closer to home she knew that her mom would continue making her food, which Maria did, all throughout college. Maria said that once Jessica left she would come home on Sundays and pick up 10-15 various food storage containers for the week so she could have home-cooked meals everyday while in college.

Although Jessica had the familial support to attend UC Beachfront, one of the top schools in the country, Jessica said the transition was still difficult for both she and her family. Maria said, "*Yo me sentía muy triste, yo la extrañaba mucho. Cuando la visitábamos yo me regresaba*

*llorando*” (I was very sad and missed her a lot. When we would visit I would come back home crying). Jessica also said that the transition was extremely difficult for her as well and there were several occasions where she considered dropping out. “It was super hard academically, socially as well. I mean I didn’t know anyone. Everyone else seemed to be doing their own thing and doing very well. I felt like I was the only one struggling.” Eventually after switching from a biology major to a sociology major, Jessica started feeling happier at UC Beachfront and said, “Even though I might not belong, it was where I wanted to be.”

Jessica graduated this past June with a Sociology and Spanish double major and currently lives at home in El Monte with her parents and sisters while she finishes her master’s degree in education. Jessica said she wants to be an elementary school teacher in the same community where she grew up. Maria continues to make Jessica her lunch before both school and work and makes sure to tell her before she leaves, “*Que te vaya bien y que Dios te acompañe*” (Have a good day and may God be with you).

### **Jessica and Maria: Reflection, Advice, Suggestions, and Ideas to Further Support First-Generation Latina College Graduate Success**

Maria said that her three daughters are her number one priority and always tries to do what she can to support them academically, but sometimes feels intimidated and not welcome when attending school workshops or meetings.

*Yo casi no voy a las juntas en las escuelas porque no me siento muy cómoda. A las juntas que yo he ido siempre me siento que todos los que están allí ya tienen sus ideas o planes de lo que van hacer. Siempre son las mismas personas que están allí y se apoyan unas a las otras, no toman en cuenta a nadie más. Es por eso que no me siento cómoda. Yo siempre pienso que no tiene caso de venir a esas juntas y perder el tiempo.*

(I hardly ever go to the meetings at school because I don’t feel comfortable. To the meetings I have been to, I always feel like everyone there already has an idea or plan of what they are going to do. It’s also always the same people who are always there supporting one another and do not consider anyone else. That is why I do not feel

comfortable. I always think what's the point of going to those meeting and just wasting time.)

Maria explained she does not like to go to PTA (Parent Teacher Association) meetings because she feels that not everyone who attends is taken to account. She said that sometimes certain mothers take control of these meetings and do what they want. She said in order for these meetings to be more inclusive, people should feel welcome regardless of whether they can participate actively in all events or not. Maria said that instead of simply going to school meetings and workshops, she has taken advantage of other community resources like the El Monte/Rosemead Adult School. Maria explained that through the adult school she was able to complete her high school diploma and knows that because of that she was better able to help her daughters when they were in elementary school.

*Yo agarre mi high school diploma aquí en la escuela de adultos, y yo creo que me sirvió mucho en tratar de ayudarles a mis hijas. Yo aprendí mucho y me arrepiento que no seguí después. La realidad es que todos deben de aprovechar esos tipos de cursos, porque de verdad que si ayudan. No debemos de dejar de pasar una oportunidad como esa. Siempre es preferible seguir estudiando y aprendiendo, porque cuando dejamos de aprender allí es donde se nos acaba todo.*

(I got my high school diploma here at the adult school, and I believe that helped me a lot when trying to help my daughters. I learned a lot and regret not continuing after. The reality is that we should all take advantage of those types of courses because they really are helpful. We should not let an opportunity like that one pass us by. It's always preferable to continue studying and learning because when we stop learning that is when everything finishes.)

Maria explained that her time studying at the adult school in El Monte was very valuable not only to her, but also to her daughters because she was able to help them with schoolwork when they were younger. She said it is important to publicize courses like those because they serve to motivate not only parents but also students in acknowledging that one never stops learning.

Jessica agrees with her mother and explained that trying to help first-generation students get into college should be not only a school effort, but a community effort.

I know it's difficult for immigrant families to attend meetings or workshops at school because everyone has to work, but this really needs to be a community effort. Our entire community should be informed of what it takes to go to college. It should be a joint effort especially in the type of community that we have.

Jessica explained that as the oldest child the process in applying for and attending college was difficult for her and her parents because they did not know what to expect or what to do. She said that parents also need to be involved in this process and although there was a "College Night" offered at her high school for both parents and students, it is not enough.

College Night was only one night out of 180 days. Besides that, there was hardly anything else in terms of emphasizing college. Everything at school was always focused on "Pass your CAHSEE. Do well on your STAR Exam. We need the funding and this will help with our funding." We need to promote college in general because I don't remember there being a lot of college enthusiasm. I mean I know not everyone will get into UC Berkeley or UCLA, but the only talk I remember about college was Rio Hondo. And that's sad, it's like we are setting the bar really low. Students need to be exposed to different types of colleges not just community colleges.

Jessica was upset that her high school lacked a college going culture and said that her school district had a relationship with the local community college, but she wanted more.

It would be great if we could get people from El Monte, or at least who grew up in a similar community, who have gone to college and students can relate to come back and talk to students. If you meet people who look like you, speak like you, and have similar stories like you...you start thinking, "Well, if they did it, so can I."

Jessica thinks it is important to promote college at all levels within the El Monte Union High School District. She emphasized that everyone needs to be involved and be on the same page in terms of applying to and going to college. She explained that schools need to motivate their students and show them that with an education anything is possible.

Maria and Jessica both agree that parents, schools, and the community need to work together to fully support students in El Monte. Schools and districts need to take into consideration the types of families their students come from and try to be more accommodating

to their work needs. By working together, Maria and Jessica, feel that students and families can be better supported when trying to obtain a higher education.

**Narrative 5: Marisol and Zenaida**

<p><b>Narrative Summary:</b> The narrative of Marisol highlights Zenaida’s story of struggle as a single mother who tried to serve as an example of what she did not want her daughters to become. Marisol used this example to further her involvement with pre-college programs and seeking help from individuals who had gone through the process of obtaining a higher education before, like her sister Cristina. Although Marisol explains that her mother was physically unable to help her with homework or projects, because she is unable to read or write and was constantly working, her mother taught her how to ask questions and never give up. Marisol is currently working on her PhD in statistics and hopes to either become a public policy researcher or professor.</p>	
<p><b>Findings Included in Narrative:</b> <i>Stories of Struggles</i> (immigration story and poverty), <i>Unconditional Support</i> (strong communication with daughters, providing food and shelter, and words of wisdom), <i>Additional Academic Support Outside of the Family</i> (pre-college programs and scholarships), <i>College Persistence</i> (difficult transition, bullying, and discrimination), <i>They Just Don’t Get It</i> (illiterate and lack of support at school)</p>	
<p><b>Marisol (College Graduate)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Age:</b> 25 years old</li> <li>● <b>Nationality:</b> US Citizen</li> <li>● <b>Edu. Level:</b> BA from Prestigious Liberal Arts College in Southern California, Pickering College</li> <li>● <b>Major:</b> BA in Mathematics</li> <li>● <b>Rel. Status:</b> Single</li> <li>● <b>Current Occupation:</b> PhD in Statistics Student at a UC in Southern California</li> <li>● Lived away from home during college. Currently has her own apartment and her mother lives with her.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Zenaida (Mom)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Age:</b> 55 years old</li> <li>● <b>Nationality:</b> Yoro, Honduras</li> <li>● <b>Edu. Level:</b> 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade</li> <li>● <b>Relationship Status:</b> Single Mother</li> <li>● <b>Occupation:</b> Homemaker</li> <li>● <b>Dad Edu. Level:</b> Unknown</li> </ul>

Figure 5. Summary and demographic data for Marisol and Zenaida.

Marisol said that she always knew there was something more to life than the small trailer home she and her sister were raised in, but was aware that it would require money. While growing up in El Monte she saw individuals with nice cars and big homes and realized that if she went to college, she too could one day obtain these “nicer things.”

Nevertheless, as she got older she realized obtaining a higher education was more complicated than she had originally imagined. As Marisol tried to blindly navigate the education system she also had to explain it to her mother and sister at the same time. Marisol's mom, Zenaida, was born in Honduras and immigrated to the United States, by herself, at the age of 23. Zenaida left her immediate family and 1 ½ year old daughter, Cristina, with her mother when she immigrated. Zenaida left Honduras with the goal “*de ser algo en la vida*” (of doing something with my life). While others were building homes and opening small stores in Zenaida's home town, she realized there was no future for her or her daughter.

Zenaida recalled her immigrant story with a fierce look on her face and strong tone in her voice. She explained how her journey is similar to the thousands of others who cross the US Mexico border without documentation but goes on to explain in detail how she was sold to various other *coyotes* [human smugglers] “*como ganado*” [like cattle]. Zenaida did not have any money to pay the *coyotes* who were smuggling her across the border and described what happened to those who did not have money to pay the \$300 smuggling fee.

*Los que no pagaban los encerraban en un cuartito, a puro golpe lo agarraban a los hombres, bañaditos en sangre los agarraban para volverlos a tirar al cerro. Y las mujeres si estaban bonitas, el jefe se encargaba de ya sabe qué. Cuando llego el jefe le dicen, “Carlos, mira esta es piedra, no tiene quién responda por ella.” Entonces miré yo que al viejo le gusté, me dije yo, “Ya estuvo, ya le gusté al señor este.” Yo desde Honduras traje mi cartoncito de pastillas porque yo dije, “Que no salga con un embarazo en el camino y ni voy a saber de quién es.” Y me dice, “¿Qué dices morenaza? ¿Te despacho para Honduras? ¿O te tiro a Tijuana?” Y le contesté “¡Yo a Tijuana, nunca! ¡Para atrás nunca!” Y que me dice, “Pues ya sabes cómo vas pagar.”*

(The ones who could not pay were jailed in a small room, with pure punches they would hit the men, soaked with blood they would throw them back to the mountains. And the women, if they were pretty, the boss would take care of them. When the boss came they told him, “Look Carlos, she's a rock, and does not have anyone who responds for her.” Then I saw that the man was attracted to me, and I told myself, “That's it, this man likes me.” I had brought a small box of birth control from Honduras with me because I told myself, “What if I become pregnant along the journey then I won't even know who it belongs to.” Then he told me, “What do you say dark skinned one? Do you want me to

send you to Honduras? Or throw you back to Tijuana?” I answered, “I’m never going back to Tijuana! Never going back!” And he told me, “Well you know how you are going to pay.”)

Zenaida was unfortunately raped multiple times on her journey to the United States and says that she has always used her story of struggle as an example to her two daughters. She explained that she never tried to hide what happened to her. Instead Zenaida would tell her daughters everything, unlike “*otras mamás Latinas que le esconden todo a sus hijos*” (other Latina moms who hide everything from their children). Zenaida prides herself in the strong communication she has with her two daughters and says, “*Mis hijas, todo supieron de mí*” (My daughters know everything about me).

Although Zenaida is unable to read or write, she explained that she always dreamt of her daughters obtaining a higher education and did everything she possibly could to make that happen. Once she finally arrived in Los Angeles, Zenaida said that Carlos, the *coyote* boss, would do as he wished with her in the evening, but during the day she would help another woman, Sandy, with her children. Zenaida started taking care of two little girls for food and shelter, but realized this was not going to help her mother and daughter who were still in Honduras. Soon afterwards she started working at a nearby bar with Sandy and would accompany men and talk with them as they drank. She explained, “*En ese tiempo los tragos costaban 12 dólares. Eran \$6 para usted y \$6 para el dueño del negocio*” (During that time the drinks cost \$12. It was \$6 for you and \$6 for the business owner). Zenaida explained that she never imagined herself working at a bar but, “*Me fui adaptando y ya me gusto a mí. ¡Estoy ganando dinero de gratis! Era como que ir a una fiesta, ahí me quedé y seguí yo trabajando*” (I was getting acclimated and started liking it. I’m earning free money! It was like going to a party, so I stayed there and kept working). After 7 years, Zenaida met Marisol’s dad and soon



afterwards Marisol was born. Unfortunately, according to Zenaida he just used her for money and she left him and went back to Honduras where she later realized she would have no future and had no choice but to return to the United States once again.

With two young daughters in tow, Cristina who was 8 and Marisol who was 1 ½, Zenaida became a *coyote* herself and took others with her to help pay for her own voyage across Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. After being assaulted on multiple occasions and being left without a dime, Zenaida explains that Marisol almost drowned as she crossed the Usumacinta River, which is located between Guatemala and Mexico. As Zenaida recalled this memory, she said “*Mira cómo tenía la cabeza de loca. Sí me la traía de mojada, me la traje de mojada*” (Just see how crazy I was in the head. I brought her as a wetback, I brought her as a wetback). Zenaida was referring to how Marisol had almost died crossing a river and getting a serious urinary tract infection when it was unnecessary since she was a U.S.-born citizen. Zenaida said that once they finally got to El Monte, Marisol was traumatized. Whenever Marisol heard sirens she would get scared and say, “*¿Dónde me escondo, mamá?*” (Where do I hide mama?), and Zenaida had no other option but to take Marisol to a psychologist for help.

Zenaida admits that she was unable to help Marisol while growing up and going to school, but Marisol explains that her mother helped her in other ways. Marisol said,

She taught me to ask questions. She would always look for someone to help answer the question for me. At the time, I was like, okay she doesn't know. But now I actually think that it turned out to be one of the biggest lessons she could've taught me. So, whenever you're stuck, ask a question. Always look for help. Always make sure that you're using your resources.

Marisol also explained that her mom always reminded her that her only job was school, so she expected her to do well. Marisol said that even though her mom was not physically around to help her academically, since she was always at work, Zenaida did what she could. Marisol

recalled that throughout high school she would always eat a peanut butter and banana sandwiches for breakfast;

I don't have a memory of not having that for breakfast, which means like, even if she was working 14 hour days she found a way and time to make sure that I had the stuff to make it every morning.

Marisol also recalled that she after coming home from school,

I would basically make the dining table mine and I would sit there for hours until like 11:00 PM doing my work and my mom would make sure that I was like eating, but also kind of gave me the space I needed. She wouldn't make a lot of noise. She'd go to the kitchen only when she needed to and she'd check up on me to make sure I was eating, she would ask if she was being too loud, she'd just give me the space to think.

Marisol clearly remembers small things her mom would do to help her, but also admits that most of the time Zenaida just did not understand what Marisol was doing. In terms of Marisol doing well in school, she explained, "It was really important theoretically but never in practice.

Sometimes she'd be like, 'Stop reading. You're reading too much. You have to clean the house.'

So, [her support] was in between I would say." Marisol claims that she never blamed her mom for not knowing, instead she tried to explain to her what she was doing. Sometimes Marisol would have to stay late at school studying, but she says she always tried to explain to her mom what she was doing and how it could potentially help her get into college.

Zenaida said that even though she never had the opportunity to go on to receive a higher education, she really wanted her daughters to have one. She tried to influence her daughters to go on to school by showing them that they did not want to live in the type of atmosphere in which they had grown up. When Zenaida was not working at the bar as a hostess, she was working at a salad distributing factory in El Monte. Zenaida said that she would get home from work and take off her wet boots, and make sure both Marisol and Cristina saw her blistered bloody feet as she took off her shoes. When Zenaida would physically show her girls the pain she had to endure

each day she wanted to make sure they understood that they did not have to live a life like the one she had.

*Así les hable a mis hijas chiquitas. “¡Esto no es casa, esto es para no vivir en la calle! Ustedes tienen su espejo que soy yo si ustedes no estudian así van a vivir siempre cómo está su mamá con ustedes, van a tener sus niños, no van a tener ni una mesa donde sentarse, porque estos son los trabajos de las personas que no son preparadas.” En ese tiempo yo trabajaba en una fábrica de ensaladas y me quitaba las botas de hule, el calcetín pegadito de sangre, porque me acostumbré para que se me hicieron callos de la bota. “Vengan para acá, estos son los trabajos de las personas que no somos estudiadas. Si ustedes no estudian así van a vivir siempre. ¡Y esta no es casa!”*

(This is how I spoke to my young daughters. “This is not a home, this is so we won’t live on the street! You have your mirror in front of you, which is me. If you don’t study you will live like your mother. You will have children and will not have a table or a place to sit. These are the types of jobs individuals who are unskilled get.” During this time, I worked at a salad factory and I would take off my rubber boots and my socks would be stuck to my boot because it was covered in blood. I was used to it because my feet had gotten accustomed to the calluses the boots caused. “Come here, these are the jobs of the people who did not obtain an education. If you don’t obtain an education you will live like this forever. And this is not a home!”)

Zenaida wanted both Marisol and Cristina to understand that the home life they had did not have to be permanent. Zenaida said that she would also try to point out individuals who had gone to school and had decent jobs. She said that every time she and her daughters went to the bank she would purposely point out the office administrators who got to work in an air conditioned office. In contrast, Zenaida also said that she would also point out the gardeners who would dig holes in the ground with sweat running down their faces. Zenaida would say,

*Miren esos no estudiaron. Miren que solazo. Esas son las personas que no se preparan. Ustedes tienen esa oportunidad en este país que yo las traje para hacer algo de la vida. Para andar bien en la sociedad. Así es que miren. Si ustedes se preparan más van a tener más y mejores cosas.*

(Look they did not study. Look at how hot it is. They are the people that were not prepared with an education. You have an opportunity in this country and I brought you here to make something out of your life. To do well in society. So, look. If you educate yourselves more you will have bigger and better things.)

Although Zenaida said that she did not think she was a very good mom because she was unable to attend Marisol's Open House or parent conferences while in school, because she was always working, she said she knew she was very lucky to have such intelligent daughters. Zenaida said she always knew Marisol was smart because ever since she was a little girl she enjoyed school and did well academically. Zenaida explained that most of the time she was unable to help, but that sometimes her two daughters would help each other. Since Cristina was 7 years older than Marisol, she tried to help her little sister any way she could. Marisol said that her sister Cristina acted more like a mother than her own mom. Besides teaching Marisol how to speak English, Cristina would also represent her mom at Back to School Nights and Open Houses. Marisol said that once Cristina graduated from high school and was in community college she started keeping greater tabs on her and making sure she was fulfilling her A-G requirements in order to be eligible to apply to a 4-year university. Marisol also started taking a more active role in terms of making sure she was doing her part to go on to a 4-year university by applying to and participating in Upward Bound, a pre-college program her high school promoted. As an Upward Bound student, Marisol participated in various summer programs and internships. During the school year, Marisol would also attend Upward Bound Saturday sessions where she learned about SAT prep, filled out college applications, and went on college field trips.

During her time in high school, Marisol said she was involved in various clubs and would challenge herself by taking higher level courses. Marisol said that although her AP classes during the time seemed like they were just "busy work" she later realized that they really helped prepare her for college. When it was ultimately time for Marisol to apply for college she credits everything to Upward Bound because "they taught me how to apply for college."

Marisol explained that she was fortunate enough to apply for and receive the QuestBridge Scholarship, an award that is primarily aimed at first-generation low-income students who are at the top of their class. With this scholarship, Marisol was matched to attend Pickering College, a small and prestigious liberal arts college not too far away from her home. Although Marisol said that her mom never told her she could not go far away to school, she had an “indirect influence” in terms of what colleges she applied. During the time, Zenaida was receiving monetary support from the government to help subsidize her rent. So, if Marisol went far away to school, Zenaida “wouldn’t be able to pay our rent.” Marisol said that before applying to college she calculated how far she could go to college without jeopardizing the financial support her mom received so she only applied to a few UC’s and Cal States. Marisol also explained, “My mom would tell me she was okay with me going anywhere, but I knew that if I left, she would be in trouble and would not have a place to live, so I stayed around.”

Marisol said she was ecstatic when she found out she was accepted to Pickering College and all she could do was cry along with her mom and sister. As an award recipient, she had to withdraw her college applications from all the other universities she had applied to, but she said that it did not matter to her because with the QuestBridge scholarship going to college “would be completely free and we wouldn’t have to pay for anything so it was the way to go.”

Although Marisol and her family were excited, the transition to college was difficult for Marisol. She explained that most of her classmates were bred to go to Pickering College with private tutors throughout their lives and supportive family members who had gone to Pickering during their undergraduate careers as well. Marisol said there were several occasions during her first year that she considered dropping out because she did not feel smart enough, but ultimately her mother and sister helped her see why she should continue with her education. Zenaida told

Marisol on several occasions that if she was not being kicked out she should not voluntarily leave because she was born in the United States and had every right to be there like any other student. Even though Marisol said that she felt she could not compete with the “rich kids,” she was still able to earn good grades her first year. Although Marisol says that she had a “horrible time” that first semester because she was not having any fun or taking care of herself, “I still got straight As. I think it was like straight A minuses, but they were still As.”

Eventually Marisol was able to get used to the bullying and the discrimination she felt while at Pickering and was accepted into a PhD program at a highly competitive UC in Southern California. Marisol currently has an apartment in San Bernardino County, because “the rent is less expensive,” and has her mom living with her. She hopes to finish her PhD program next year and become a researcher. She said she wants to study public policy and assess current laws and resources for low-income communities.

### **Marisol and Zenaida: Reflection, Advice, Suggestions, and Ideas to Further Support First-Generation Latina College Graduate Success**

As a single mother, Zenaida said the only thing that could have possibly helped her daughters more was “*si hubiera trabajado menos para poder ayudarles más*” (if I would have worked less to help them more). Zenaida said that her daughters raised themselves. She explained that as she left for work at 4AM she would just tell them not to open their trailer door to any strangers. Her daughters would feed themselves and get ready by themselves as well. When Zenaida would return home from work at 10PM, “*Era solo para bañarme y dormirme. Yo tenía que hacer lo mismo el día siguiente*” (It was simply to shower and sleep. I had to do the same thing the next day).

Zenaida said that she was on government assistance for most of Marisol's educational career, but it still was not enough to pay for her rent and bills. She said that the poverty her family went through is what inspired her daughters to continue with their education. *"Yo siempre he sido el ejemplo de mis niñas. Yo fui su espejo de lo que no fueran en sus vidas"* (I have always been my daughters' example. I was the mirror of what they should not be in their life). Zenaida never attended any meetings or workshops at her daughters' school. She could also never help her daughters with homework because she does not know how to read or write. She explained that the only thing that could help her family was not be so poor.

Marisol's mother could not physically help her with her academics because she had to work to provide for her family, but Marisol managed to get help from outside sources. She says that if it were not for Upward Bound and QuestBridge, she would not be the person she is today. She said that as an Upward Bound participant, she learned about her culture, ethnicity, and the struggles she would have to overcome while in college. For example,

I learned about oppression, repression, and suppression with Upward Bound. In my regular K-12 education this was never addressed and because of that people who live in our type of communities do not know that something better exists outside of El Monte. Most of my peers thought that we lived well, but that's not true. But by going to Upward Bound and working with tutors who were college students who had experienced the world outside of El Monte, or more so outside of our poor community, I learned more existed. This was very useful. In Upward Bound we also got to read about our own history as underrepresented students and people of color which really helped me figure out how I should approach my own journey.

Marisol said that programs like Upward Bound provided the support that was missing not only from home but also from school. She stressed that as a first-generation student of color, sometimes she felt like she did not belong at Pickering College and suffered greatly. She explained that attending an institution like Pickering as a student of color makes you question whether you really belong or are simply another Latina they need to fill a quota. She explained,

I think it's important to get parents involved, if it's possible, because I know a lot of parents who live in my type of community work long hours. But regardless, parents really need to be told about what their children are going to experience once they go to college. Parents need to know what their kids are going to go through because there is definitely a disconnect in terms of what students go through and what parents think their children go through. I know for a fact that up until I graduated from college my mom did not know that I was having a hard time and was going through a lot both mentally and emotionally in terms of the type of people I was going to school with. And it's also difficult to talk about it when you're going through it. The truth is my mom would have never known...and she didn't know...until I graduated just how hard it really was... So, just having or providing parents with information...and letting them know about the struggles and processes that their children will go through would really help.

Marisol said she was bullied and discriminated against when she went to Pickering and considered dropping out on several occasions. She said her mom and sister had no idea what she was going through her first year in college and when looking back wishes they could have helped her more emotionally. Marisol explained that in her opinion it is important to continue supporting and recommending programs like Upward Bound and QuestBridge to first-generation college bound students because they provide the support many students of color are lacking at home.

If it wasn't for Upward Bound and QuestBridge I wouldn't have gone to Pickering... and if I hadn't gone to Pickering then I most likely would not get working on my PhD now. Maybe I would have done it eventually, but definitely not right out of undergrad. The reality is that programs like these need to be further supported because they put students like myself in places that we would not be otherwise.

Marisol credits Upward Bound and QuestBridge with her success in terms of applying to and paying for college, but acknowledges that she could have used more support from her family.

Zenaida was unable to help her daughter as a single mother who was constantly working to provide for her family. She explained that the only way she could have done more for her daughters was by working less. Both Zenaida and Marisol agree that schools and communities need to be cognizant of the families they serve and try to be more supportive of their needs.



Marisol said she was fortunate that she found support from outside programs like Upward Bound and QuestBridge; however, many other students of color are not as fortunate.

**Narrative 6: Elizabeth and Petra**

<p><b>Narrative Summary:</b> Elizabeth said her mother, Petra, was not helpful in terms of her going on to obtain a higher education. She said that she is very independent and even if she did need help her parents were not going to be able to provide that support because they did not understand the process. Elizabeth lost touch with her parents, especially her mom, when she left to UC Bayview. Nevertheless, now that she has graduated she has deferred a job offer as an industrial engineer at a large car manufacturing company to try to reconcile her relationship with her mom and regain what she lost four years ago.</p> <p><b>Findings Included in Narrative:</b> <i>Stories of Struggles</i> (Father not around due to work and lack of transportation), <i>Unconditional Support</i> (Help with homework, special dinners, extracurricular activities, chore chart, words of wisdom, providing supplies for projects, transportation, and lying to husband), <i>Additional Academic Support Outside of the Family</i> (Mentors and influential teachers), <i>College Persistence</i> (Lack of communication and father not approving of leaving), and <i>They Just Don't Get It</i> (Didn't understand what it took to get to college).</p>	
<p><b>Elizabeth (College Graduate)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Age:</b> 23 years old</li> <li>● <b>Nationality:</b> US Citizen</li> <li>● <b>Edu. Level:</b> BA from UC Bayview located in Northern California</li> <li>● <b>Major:</b> Industrial Engineering &amp; Operations Research</li> <li>● <b>Rel. Status:</b> Single</li> <li>● <b>Current Occupation:</b> Currently travelling throughout Europe with her mother. Will start a new job this summer as an industrial and systems engineer for large car manufacturing corporation in Michigan.</li> <li>● Lived away from home during college and currently lives away from home.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Petra (Mom)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Age:</b> 47 Years Old</li> <li>● <b>Nationality:</b> Sinaloa, Mexico</li> <li>● <b>Edu. Level:</b> Middle School</li> <li>● <b>Rel. Status:</b> Married for 28 years</li> <li>● <b>Occupation:</b> Homemaker</li> <li>● <b>Dad Edu. Level:</b> 6<sup>th</sup> Grade</li> </ul>

Figure 6. Summary and demographic data for Elizabeth and Petra.

Elizabeth explained that although her parents did not acquire a higher education in Mexico or the United States they still played a fundamental role in her education. She said that instead of using the word “education” she would say “being educated.” To Elizabeth, this meant “having respect, having values, and having morals.”

Elizabeth's mom, Petra, was born and raised in Sinaloa, but met Elizabeth's dad, Fernando, in Tijuana, Mexico. Petra was raised in a small town but was tired "*del pueblo, de estudiar, de trabajar...y yo me quería salir de mi casa*" (of the small town, studying, working... and I wanted to leave my home). Petra said that she started working at 5 years old plucking chickens and would go to school, but really found no future in her small town. She found an opportunity to leave her home to help an aunt who had broken her arm in the border town of Tijuana. While there, she met Fernando and got married. Once married they both decided to immigrate to the United States where their two children, Daniel and Elizabeth, were born.

Elizabeth explained that she has always been very independent and never really asked her parents for help, but if there was someone who really impacted her life it was her father, Fernando. Elizabeth said that her mom has always been "the really really shy one." Elizabeth described her mom as a neutralizer. "She neutralizes things. She is my little pacifier," Elizabeth explained. Elizabeth also said her mom was like a lamb compared to her father, who she described as a lion. According to Elizabeth, Petra was just always very quiet and never wanted to go against what Fernando said or did. Elizabeth explained that Petra preferred not to be in the limelight, instead she "always liked being in the shadows." Petra would also "never contradict my father in front of us, but if my father ever changed his mind it was probably because my mom convinced him in the background." Elizabeth explained that Petra did not play a big role in terms of her obtaining a higher education, but that she did not blame her mother because she just was not aware of what the process entailed. Elizabeth also said that her case was different because she knows for a fact other moms were involved because she saw it firsthand. She explained that in elementary school a lot of her friends' moms were involved, but hers simply was not. While

talking, Elizabeth started questioning whether it was her own fault her mom was not involved, stating,

Most of the students who brought their parents were part of The Gates Scholars Program or other nicer programs, but I never got in what seemed to be these nicer programs. So, I always questioned whether it was because my mom was not as involved. Now I obviously don't care. I could care less. But when you're young you think about these things and wonder why their moms are always here and they get all these cool things.

Although Elizabeth said that her mother did not play as important a role as her father, she did say that her mom would do other small gestures to help her. For example, Petra was able to finish her GED through the adult education program and Elizabeth said she was able to help her with her algebra homework when she was in elementary and middle school. In addition, according to Elizabeth, Petra also always offered to help her with projects that entailed arts and crafts, but she admitted that she usually did not take her up on these offers. Elizabeth stated,

To be honest, she helped my brother out more with projects than me. She played a huge role when it came to his stuff. But with me, I wanted to do everything on my own. She didn't help me so much.

One thing that Elizabeth did mention with excitement was that whenever Elizabeth or her brother, Daniel, won an award at school, Petra would cook them their favorite meal. She explained, "That was the biggest thing to us if mom made you something you wanted. It meant you had done something really good."

While speaking with Petra she explained that her husband, Fernando, and her always wanted something more for their children. Petra said that from the time Daniel and Elizabeth were born "*Queríamos algo diferente para ellos porque nosotros mirábamos que si aquí estudiabas podías ejercer*" (We wanted something different for them because we would see that if you studied here you would be able to succeed). Petra also explained that although it may sound negative, she genuinely feels that in the United States children are taught that by obtaining

a higher education you can succeed. In contrast, *“En México es muy diferente porque aunque estudies y seas el mejor estudiante, si no tienes quien te ayude, es como tiempo perdido”* (In Mexico it’s very different because even if you study and are the best student, if you don’t have someone to help you, it’s like you’re wasting your time). Petra explained that you should always know someone or have connections with others who are successful in Mexico to help you move up. She thought this was unfair, which is why she wanted both of her children to obtain a higher education in the United States.

Petra explained that her husband Fernando is a cross country diesel truck driver, and while Daniel and Elizabeth were growing up there were multiple weeks at a time where he was gone. Nevertheless, this did not stop Petra from keeping her kids busy. She said that she would hear from neighbors and relatives that having your kids involved in extracurricular activities was something positive, so she made sure that both Daniel and Elizabeth were registered and attended different activities. For example, *“Siempre yo los metí en algo. Ellos estuvieron en clases de natación, clases de futbol, y de karate”* (I always enrolled them in something. They would attend swimming lessons, soccer, and karate). Although Petra did not drive during this time, she said she and her kids got around on the trolley, a public transportation system within El Monte. Nevertheless, soon enough Petra learned how to drive, which she says was very helpful especially when picking up and dropping off her kids at school. Although she was scared, she said both Daniel and Elizabeth would help her navigate their way home. Petra also said that she tried to keep her kids motivated; had a calendar with different chores or assignments and would give them a quarter or dollar once they were finished, depending on the task. She said that although she knows that kids should be intrinsically motivated and do chores and homework because it is their responsibility, she said that she would get happy to see Daniel and Elizabeth so

excited. Petra also said that she prided herself in always teaching her kids to behave, be punctual, and be confident. Petra explained that it was also important to have *“comunicación, tanto del hijo para el papa como del papa para con el hijo. Mientras que no exista esa confianza entre padre e hijo cada uno va a agarrar por su lado”* (communication, so much so from child to parent as to parent to child. If there is not any trust between child and parent each one will go their separate way). She said that she always tried to make sure she had a positive relationship with both Daniel and Elizabeth and that they both felt comfortable enough to talk to her if they ever needed anything.

Petra also said that Elizabeth never really asked her for help in terms of finishing an assignment or project because Elizabeth always wanted to do everything by herself. She said that she would make sure that she had all the necessary materials to get the work done, but never really physically helped her complete anything. For example, *“Yo casi en la escuela de Elizabeth nunca le ayude a hacer una tarea o un proyecto. Yo solo era su chofer 24 horas al día para cuando ella me necesitaba. Yo solo la miraba estudiando”* (I hardly ever helped Elizabeth with homework or a project. I was simply her chauffeur 24 hours a day for when she needed me. I would just see her study). Elizabeth said the same thing and explained she would rather just do the work herself, unlike her brother Daniel who always asked for help from his parents.

Petra also said that Elizabeth was very different from Daniel and almost wanted to go against the grain. Petra said that she remembered a few times where Elizabeth wanted to go to school dances or late night activities at school, but Fernando would not let her go because she was a girl. However, since he was usually away driving his big rig, Petra would let her go regardless of what her husband had said. When Fernando would call, Petra would tell him that Elizabeth was showering and then rush to pick her up from wherever she was so she could be

home by the time her husband called again. Petra stated, *“Yo hasta me convertía en mentirosa para tratar de cubrirle...pero yo también fui joven”* (I even became a liar to try to cover for her...but I was also young once).

Elizabeth was very clear that she liked doing things on her own, that for the most part her mom was supportive of her decisions, but always had to present a good case to her father. “In the family I come from, it is the father who gets the last word...I know my mom was supportive of me striving for my goals, but I don’t think she would ever go against what my dad said.” Petra recalled an incident once in middle school where Elizabeth wanted to have a boyfriend, but Fernando was against the idea and even threatened to move his family out of state so Elizabeth could no longer see him. When asked what happened Petra said, *“Dicho como hecho. Cuando el niño se fue a la high school allá conoció a otra niña”* (No sooner said than done. When the boy left to high school he met another girl over there). Petra said that even she was upset at the news of the boy finding a new girlfriend because it made her sad to see how upset Elizabeth was about the breakup.

Elizabeth said that although she really did not ask for help while growing up, there were a few people who helped her along the way. For example, Elizabeth said that in middle school she had a counselor who she would socialize with a lot with and eventually considered her a mentor.

She would take us out sometimes to events and whatnot. She was also the one who told me, “If you want to keep exploring the world there’s no better way to do it than by going to college.” So, I kind of tricked myself. I wanted to have more experiences. So, I think my strive for independence was just as important as my strive for gaining knowledge.

She also said that once she got into high school, she participated in Upward Bound during the summer after her freshman year, but “that went south real quick.” Elizabeth said that she was surrounded by the wrong people, “they were very immature and being silly.” Elizabeth explained that she could get an equal or better result doing the work on her own versus being told what to

do and when to do it from the Upward Bound staff, so she dropped out of the program the following fall.

Elizabeth also mentioned a few teachers who she admired and helped her in high school. She described spending a lot of time with a math teacher who held an unofficial math tutoring club after school. Elizabeth said, “I enjoyed doing my work after school and tutoring other students.” She also talked about her English teacher who stressed how important it was for students to get started with their personal statements. She said, “If it wasn’t for Mr. McKenzie I don’t know how well I would have done on my personal statements because McKenzie really made you think critically about every word you put on your essay.” Elizabeth also mentioned that Mr. McKenzie would take her class to her high school’s career center, “but that was a waste of time.” She said that when she went to the career center it was always “click here, click there,” and she could do that on her own.

Elizabeth said that for the most part she did everything on her own in terms of applying to college. She said that she applied to six colleges and universities: four UCs and two schools that were out of state. She explained that her mom did not have any influence over what schools she applied to because she did not know how to navigate the application process. She said she applied to the two schools that were out of state “just for funsies,” meaning that she never really considered going she just wanted to see if she would be accepted. She said that even though she had been accepted into one of Chicago’s best schools, she could not bring herself to go. Elizabeth said that the financial aid package they offered her was not very good so she felt guilty in both leaving and asking for money. “I felt like that was not going to happen. So, it was a complete no for me,” she said. Elizabeth explained she was afraid if she even mentioned leaving out of state for college her father might have said “no” to college altogether. “I had to learn

how to negotiate with my father. I became a very good negotiator,” she said. Eventually Elizabeth decided to go to UC Bayview, a very prestigious research university, located in northern California, about 7 hours away from her home.

Nevertheless, the decision to leave was not an easy one. Fernando did not want Elizabeth to leave El Monte. Both Petra and Elizabeth said that Fernando was set on Elizabeth going to Rio Hondo Community College, located about 5 miles from her home. Fernando was adamant that Elizabeth go to Rio Hondo and even tried to convince Petra that it was Elizabeth’s best option. Petra said that at one point she got upset with her husband and had to speak with him privately for him to stop saying that Elizabeth should go to Rio Hondo. She said she told him, “*¡Hombre estás loco tú! Mis hijos que vallan a donde ellos quieran solo que estudien*” (You’re crazy! Our kids can go wherever they want as long as they study).

Once Elizabeth left, Petra said she was more “*cerrada*” (closed off) than ever. Both Petra and Elizabeth said that when Elizabeth left for UC Bayview, she did not want her parents to accompany her and left by herself. Elizabeth said she bought her own plane ticket, packed her own bag, and took public transportation after her flight all the way to her new school. Elizabeth said she had no clue where she was going, but it did not matter because she was doing what she had worked so hard to accomplish.

Nevertheless, Elizabeth said that she had a very difficult transition once she left home. Although she had completed two Summer Bridge programs for students of color during the summer before her first semester she said, “my As in high school were worth a D- here and there was nothing I could do about it.” Elizabeth said she was overwhelmed and UC Bayview was making her insane. She said she is not a “crier,” but was practically crying every day out of frustration.



I had this frustration because I was trying so hard and I was not getting anywhere and my peers were not trying that hard and they were fine. I also felt alone because I was always studying and my friends were out partying at the fraternities. I felt like I was a slave to UC Bayview and there was nothing I could do about it because this was the only school that had offered to pay for everything.

Elizabeth said that she purposely never told anyone of the turmoil she was going through because she knew that her parents would have told her to just come home if they knew she was having a difficult time. She explained that she did not think it would matter if she would have told her parents what she was going through,

because it is not like my parents were in a position of power to help me either. They didn't have the money to help me. Their response would have been come home and go to Rio Hondo. But I was determined not to go back. I told myself I deserve to be here just like everyone else. I may not have had the resources, but it didn't matter...I said screw it, I'm just going to stay here.

At one point Elizabeth explained that she did not have enough money for food and was eating lunch at the park with the homeless community. She would sit on the benches and people would drop off food for everyone who was there. She said this is not something everyone knows about her but she is also not embarrassed to say it because, "God it was so hard because there was nothing for me when I started."

Petra never knew how hard that first year was for Elizabeth, because Elizabeth admitted that she had closed off all communication with her mom. Petra said that before Elizabeth left they were close and admitted that she does not have very many friends and would spend most of her time with Elizabeth, so when she left she took it very hard. "*Yo lloraba, pero a solas. Yo no quería que ella me escuchara porque alomejor se agitaba*" (I would cry, but while I was alone. I did not want her to hear me because she could become agitated). Both Petra and Elizabeth said that after the first few weeks they started communicating through emojis. Petra said that at first she would try to call Elizabeth on the phone, but after a while saw that Elizabeth was busy and

started just text messaging. Petra explained that Elizabeth was always somewhat quiet, but when she left Petra did not even know what to say because she could not offer any advice. Petra explained, *“la universidad era otro mundo y yo no me sentía capaz de darle consejos”* (attending a university was another world and I did not feel capable of providing advice).

Elizabeth walked last Spring for graduation, but was taking an additional engineering course and working at UC Bayview this past Fall. She said she was planning to spend a few months at home after her course and before starting her job as an industrial and design engineer at a large car manufacturing company. She explained that she wanted to work on her relationship with her mom. “Going to college definitely injured my relationship with my mom, like dramatically. We are not as close as we were in the past. So, I feel like I let my parents down,” said Elizabeth. She explained that she was so overwhelmed with school work that in her eyes there was nothing that could help her besides studying more. Elizabeth said she feels bad because “I put my interests before theirs.” Elizabeth explained that she put her education first and although others may see that as a good thing, at the end of the day, “When I go to sleep I think oh my gosh my relationship with my parents is everything and it is not where I want it to be right now and it hurts.” She is currently travelling throughout Europe with her mom trying to rebuild the relationship she claims was broken due to her leaving to attend UC Bayview.

### **Elizabeth and Petra: Reflection, Advice, Suggestions, and Ideas to Further Support First-Generation Latina College Graduate Success**

As Elizabeth reflected on her educational career, she said she felt sad. As a first-generation student she explained, “I never got the opportunity to see what was out there. One of the saddest things for me was that I never went to Bayview until I was accepted.” She said that in order for students to succeed, they need to be provided with exposure. She explained that most

students at Bayview would talk about how their parents took them to several universities before deciding where they would eventually apply. However, “As first-generation students, not even just as low-income students, our parents do not even know where to begin in terms of going to college.” Elizabeth emphasized that immigrant parents do not know what it means to go to college in the United States so they are unable to help their children. She also explained that had she known more about Bayview before attending, she may have selected another university.

I didn't even know what I was signing myself up for until I got to college. I didn't realize Bayview was a research institution. There's a lot of things that I don't want to say I regret, but had I known, I would have done things differently. It's just the not knowing and not being exposed to it beforehand. The reason why I feel exposure is so important is that you don't even know what questions to ask when you don't know. That's where my frustration comes because there is no exposure that even when you get to college you don't know how to navigate because you don't even know what questions to ask.

Elizabeth said she was frustrated because although she had worked very hard during high school, it was not enough for Bayview. Also, as a first-generation student, she did not know where to turn to find more support. Additionally, she also mentioned that as a middle school and high school student, she was very fortunate to always have a mentor who did not necessarily help her with college applications and financial aid, but would provide advice and moral support. At UC Bayview, Elizabeth said she had no one to turn to, and although her parents had been supportive while she was in high school, it was not enough at Bayview.

Elizabeth said that parents need to be aware of not only what it takes to get into college but also the benefits. Elizabeth explained that she understands that parents come home tired from work but there really needs to be something tangible in terms of “getting the conversation started about what happens in college.” She said that many of the workshops she attended with her parents in high school always focused on the costs of going to college, but really need to focus on “the benefits of going and getting a higher education.”

When asked, Petra agreed with her daughter and said that for parents to really help their children academically they need to know what is going on at school. Petra also explained that with so much technology nowadays, this should be easier than in the past. She said that although she always went to school workshops and meetings other parents would not because they were never informed because their kids would lose or never give their parents the workshop details. Petra suggests that schools use text messages, email, and even social media to relay important information regarding workshops and meetings to parents, in addition to mailing out fliers and phone calls. Petra explained that parents need to be informed of what is going on with their children at school to better support them academically.

*Los papás tienen que saber lo que está pasando con sus hijos. En realidad, muchos papas no saben cómo funciona lo de ir a una universidad en los Estados Unidos y dependen de lo que les dicen sus amigos. “Uy no! Tu hija cuando salga va a deber mucho dinero y va a salir bien endrogada y no va a poder pagar.” Cuando escuchan eso los papas se desaniman y dicen “Mejor que mi hijo agarre una carrera técnica de dos años o algo cortito.” En realidad no se informan bien los papas y piensan que sus hijos no pueden ir a la universidad solo porque un amigo les dijo que la universidad es cara, pero ellos en realidad no saben. Porque en México si no tienes dinero no puedes ir a la universidad. Allá si no tienes dinero no vas y no importa si el niño es inteligente. Es por esto que los papas tienen que ir a los talleres e informarse de los profesionales, ya sean los maestros o los directores de las escuelas. Yo entiendo que el trabajo consume a muchos papas y llegan cansados, pero tienen que ser el esfuerzo para ir a las juntas y aprender.*

(Parents need to know what is happening with their children. In fact, many parents do not know how it works to go to a university in the United States and they depend on what their friends tell them. “Oh, no! When your daughter leaves, she will owe a lot of money and will not be able to pay.” When they hear that parents get discouraged and say, “It’s better for my daughter to get a 2-year technical career or something short.” In reality they are not well informed and they think that their children cannot go to a university just because a friend told them that universities are expensive, but they do not really know. Because in Mexico if you do not have money you cannot go to a university. In Mexico, if you do not have money you do not go to a university and it does not matter if the child is intelligent. This is why parents have to go to school workshops and get information from the professionals, either the teachers or the administrators of the schools. I understand that work consumes many parents and they get tired, but they have to make the effort to go to meetings and learn.)

Petra explained that many times immigrant parents are afraid of the unknown and are misguided with incorrect information about going to college. She said that many times family members would scare her and say they had heard of other students who were going to college taking out \$200K in loans. Petra explained that unless parents attend workshops or learn from those who have already gone to college they will never learn the truth.

Petra said that one thing she found super helpful and motivating in trying to help her two kids go to college was listening to other students who had already gone to college. She explained that there were several occasions at Elizabeth's middle school and high school where they got to listen to college graduates who had gone to the same middle school and high school share their story.

*Yo me acuerdo muy bien cuando mi hija iba a la middle school y conocimos a otra muchacha que había ido a la universidad y platico su historia. Nos dijo que su mama siempre había tratado de ahorrar dinero para que fuera a la universidad, pero al fin no necesito ese dinero porque se había ganado puras becas y con eso había pagado todo. Eso nos llamó mucho la atención porque, aunque tenían ese dinero no lo necesito porque había ganado todas las becas. Y cuando escuchamos eso Elizabeth se animó mucho y me dijo que ella quería lo mismo.*

(I remember very well when my daughter was in middle school and we met a girl who had gone to college and told her story. She told us that her mother had always tried to save money for her to go to college, but in the end did not need that money because she had earned many scholarships and with that she was able to pay for everything. That got our attention because even though they had saved that money, they did not need it because she had won all those scholarships. When we heard that story Elizabeth was very encouraged and told me that she wanted the same thing.)

According to Petra, it is very encouraging for both students and parents to listen to other students from the community who have gone through the process of obtaining a college degree. She suggested that schools continue to bring successful students back to campus to share their stories and help others grow.

Both Petra and Elizabeth emphasized that it is important to learn from one another either through exposure, workshops, or students who have gone through the process. According to both Petra and Elizabeth parents and students need to be aware of not only what is necessary to get into college, but also what it is going to be like once you are there.

**Narrative 7: Julia and Ofelia**

<p><b>Narrative Summary:</b> Julia credits her teachers and her AVID program for helping her get into college and admits that although her mother, Ofelia, tried to help her, it was not enough. The fact was that Ofelia did not know how to help her, but according to Julia that was not her fault. Instead Ofelia provided a different kind of support that included a clean home, food, and school supplies. Julia is currently finishing her master’s degree and plans to start teaching full-time in the fall as an elementary school teacher in El Monte.</p> <p><b>Findings Included in Narrative:</b> <i>Stories of Struggles</i> (Poverty in Mexico), <i>Unconditional Support</i> (Provide quiet space to study at home, transportation, attend meetings at school, stable home life, and purchasing school supplies), <i>Additional Academic Support Outside of the Family</i> (AVID, mentors, role models, and extracurricular activities), <i>College Persistence</i> (Lack of class availability and academic probation), and <i>They Just Don’t Get It</i> (Mother never had the opportunity to go to school and mother did not defend against principal).</p>	
<p><b>Julia (College Graduate)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Age:</b> 26 years old</li> <li>● <b>Nationality:</b> US Citizen</li> <li>● <b>Edu. Level:</b> BA from Cal State Ocean Bay</li> <li>● <b>Major:</b> BA in Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies</li> <li>● <b>Rel. Status:</b> Single</li> <li>● <b>Current Occupation:</b> Teacher’s Aide and working on her MEd at a private Christian University.</li> <li>● Lived at home first semester of college, then lived away from home during undergrad. Currently lives at home.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ofelia (Mom)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Age:</b> 53 years old</li> <li>● <b>Nationality:</b> Chihuahua, Mexico</li> <li>● <b>Edu. Level:</b> 6<sup>th</sup> Grade</li> <li>● <b>Relationship Status:</b> Married for 29 years</li> <li>● <b>Occupation:</b> Babysitter &amp; Homemaker</li> <li>● <b>Dad Edu. Level:</b> Attended high school, but did not graduate.</li> </ul>

Figure 7. Summary and demographic data for Julia and Ofelia.

Julia was born and raised in El Monte. She has three sisters and is the only person in her immediate family to have obtained a college degree. During her *plática* she explained she has always loved school and dreamt of one day going to college, “but that dream was never really a

reality until I went to high school and joined AVID.” Julia said that no one ever forced her or told her to do well; “I did good because I wanted to do good.” Julia also said that her motivation came from within because she just loved being involved with extracurricular activities and learning. She describes herself as a “natural born leader” who loves being in charge.

Julia explained that her mom was raised with 14 other siblings in Mexico in a single room with abusive parents. She said that unfortunately her mom was never given the same opportunity she has to obtain a higher education. Julia’s mom, Ofelia, confirmed during her *plática* that her family was very poor and could not afford to send her to school. She said they did not even have money for clothes, let alone school.

Ofelia started working at 11 years old cleaning houses and taking care of children in Mexico. When she turned 14 she immigrated to the United States to help her sister who had just had a baby. During this time her older sister also enrolled her in high school in the United States, but Ofelia said, “*Me acuerdo que yo no sabía nada y me sentía muy atrás. Siempre he sido muy cerrada y no quería que me preguntaran nada porque todo era en Inglés*” (I remember that I didn’t know anything and felt very behind. I’ve always been very reserved and didn’t want them to ask me anything because everything was in English). A few months later, Ofelia dropped out of high school and started working with another family in Hacienda Heights as a nanny and maid. She explained that as soon as she turned 18 she started working at the same restaurant where her sister was working at as a waitress. For several years, Ofelia would travel between the United States and Mexico with the help of a *coyote*, a human smuggler. She said,

*Antes era bien barato, solo cobraban 300 dólares. Yo iba a ver a mi mamá y regresaba otra vez a trabajar y juntar mi dinerito. Así me la pasaba yendo y viniendo hasta que conocí a mi esposo.*

Back then it was cheap, they only charged 300 dollars. I would go to visit my mom and come back to work and save more money. I spent my time going and coming until I met my husband.

Soon afterwards, Ofelia got married, got her legal residency through her husband, had a set of twin daughters, and 4 years later had Julia. Once Julia was born, Ofelia said she stopped working and dedicated herself to her daughters and taking care of other children in her home. “*Yo siempre me he dedicado a cuidar niños en mi casa porque me gustan mucho los niños*” (I have always taken care of kids in my home because I love kids), said Ofelia.

When asked what Ofelia did to help Julia while she was in school, she said she really did not help her.

*Yo no sé mucho porque yo no estudie. Pero yo aseguraba siempre tenerle un lugar apropiado para hacer su tarea sin ruido y también tenerle su comida lista para que se alimentara bien. Con eso le ayudaba yo porque le digo con la tarea pues casi no porque no se mucho.*

(I don't know much because I did not study. But I would make sure to always have a quiet place for her to study and food ready for her to eat. With that I would help her because as I said with homework I could not help because I don't know much.)

Julia confirmed what her mom said was true, and added, “She was supportive, I just don't think she has any knowledge when it comes to school or obtaining a higher education.” Julia recalled a time when her elementary school principal kept picking on her and she even got suspended unjustly from school. She said her mom did not do anything to defend her. On the contrary,

My mom would just take it and never tried to see my side. She never defended me. Whatever she was told, she believed. She just didn't have the confidence or the attitude to stand up to someone, especially the principal.

Thinking back to this memory, Julia said it made her upset but she could not blame her mom for not knowing. She said, “I don't want to make her sound like she was a bad mom because she did everything she could, but...I wouldn't say she had a big role [in me obtaining a higher education].” During the *plática*, Julia also explained “My mom just doesn't understand, you



know?” When she was younger, Julia said that her mom always told her “*pórtate bien*” (behave) and “be a good girl... and stay pure.” Julia explained that this type of advice did not make sense because she was already a good girl and really did not need her mom to remind her. As she got older, Julia said she also realized she was totally against most of the things her mom used to bring up and believes it was based on her strict Catholic faith. Julia said, “I’m very anti-religion, especially Catholicism. We disagree on a lot of things...but she wouldn’t even be able to understand my point of view.” Julia said she avoids talking to her mom about sensitive topics like religion or abortion. Julia said she is sure this has to do with her undergraduate major, feminism. When asked if Ofelia considers herself a religious person, she quickly and proudly responded with “*¡Si!*” (Yes!), but could not say the same for her husband or daughters. She explained that when her daughters were younger they would go together as a family to church, but now they longer want to attend any religious services.

Nevertheless, Julia said that although her mother did not obtain a higher education, there were several small ways that Ofelia helped her during school. Julia said, “She was willing to whatever she could on her part. Even if it was small things, like picking me up late from school or driving me and a group of friends to wherever we needed to go.” Julia also added that her mom always attended parent meetings at school and volunteered to go on fieldtrips with her class. “I knew that I could count on her for anything. She never said anything negative. If we had a college night at school, she would come. If I had a choir concert, she would come,” said Julia. Ofelia confirmed that she always tried to go to the meetings at school because, “*Mi mama nunca iba a las juntas, ni mi papa. Nadie los conocían en mi escuela y yo dije pues yo no quiero ser como ellos y yo si iba a las juntas*” (My mom never went to the meetings, nor my dad. No one at my school knew them and I said I did not want to be like them and would go to the meetings).

Ofelia explained that she also tried to make sure their home was stable, meaning that although their house was small, she tried to make sure it was always clean, organized, and free from arguments or fights. She said that she never argues with her husband, which Julia confirmed. Julia said that her dad has also been very supportive of her academic decisions and when compared to other Mexican dads was not very strict. She laughed and said, “I don’t think he could have been when he was surrounded by five women.” Both Julia and Ofelia said that Arturo was also always more keen to help Julia with school work. Ofelia said that she was always happy to go and purchase the supplies that were necessary for Julia’s projects, but in terms of sitting down and helping Julia complete a project, it was always Arturo. Ofelia said once Julia was done with any project though, *“le decía que bonita y se las cuidaba por un tiempo por ahí en nuestra casa”* (I would tell her it was a nice project and I would take care of it and display it in our house for a while). Ofelia also said she was proud of Julia because she has always been very intelligent and whatever she does it is always well done. Ofelia mentioned that she still has hundreds of photos from when Julia was in school and would win awards. She explained that there were no cell phones back then but she did have her *“camarita”* (little camera) and would take pictures of Julia and all her trophies, many of which she still proudly displays in her home.

Julia said that her parents were somewhat helpful in terms of her obtaining a higher education, but was very clear in emphasizing that it was only to a certain extent because they never received a higher education themselves. Nevertheless, Julia said that she did find a lot of support from teachers, extracurricular activities, and various pre-college programs while growing up. She said she is still friends with several teachers who supported her and served as role models and mentors. For example, she mentioned one influential teacher who she recalls fondly and said, “I considered her like my mom and looked up to her because she was really

professional, going to be a principal, and just very knowledgeable.” Julia also mentioned another teacher who was very influential, stating, “She was Mexican like me. Even though she grew up poor, she did it. She moved out of Santa Cruz, came to El Monte and accomplished her goals.” Julia said she remembers both teachers fondly because “they were both part of my educational journey...they showed me that anything was possible and I could do it.” Julia also mentioned participating in several extracurricular activities while in high school such as choir, the Associated Student Body (ASB), the Key Club, the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), Stage Crew, and another community service organization. Julia also proudly said that she was the first president of AVID , a pre-college group at her school which she credits entirely for helping her get into college.

Julia explained that without AVID she is not sure she would have gone on to college. “If it wasn’t for AVID I have no idea if college would have even been a possibility,” said Julia. She was involved in AVID for 4 years and through the program had access to college tutors, test prep, and a mentor. Her AVID instructor, Mrs. Chang, served as both her teacher and mentor. She said that the program and Mrs. Chang were her biggest motivators in applying to and going to college. She remembers the night that her college applications were due “the system crashed” and she called Mrs. Chang at midnight crying telling her, “Oh my God! This isn’t working, what can I do?” Although Julia was finally able to submit her applications later that morning, she remembers that it brought her comfort that someone like Mrs. Chang was available to help. Although Julia was accepted to several universities her senior year, unfortunately she was unable to attend any, which according to her was one of her biggest regrets. Julia said she failed her chemistry class her senior year, which meant all her college acceptances were rescinded. “I was

so disappointed, especially with Mrs. Chang...she was the one I failed, not anyone else,” said Julia.

Julia ended up going to a local community college the first semester after she graduated and said she hated it. She said she had to spend an entire week walking into classes asking if there was enough room for her, “It was so difficult to try to get a class...it was horrible!” Eventually, Julia said she got an email from nearby Cal State Ocean Bay letting her know there was enough room for her if she wished to enroll second semester, regardless of the F she had earned in Chemistry during high school. Julia said she practically jumped at the opportunity and was excited to leave. When asked if she would have rather gone to a university that was farther away from home and said,

No, I don't think I would have wanted to go far away... I'm very close with my family. My baby sister had also just been born, I wouldn't have wanted to miss out on the first 4 years of her life. So, I don't think I would have wanted to move that far.

Ofelia said that she and Arturo drove Julia to Cal State Ocean Bay and was upset at the idea of just leaving her there. However, Ofelia said that she understood it was for Julia's own good and was proud that Julia wanted to continue studying. Julia said the first semester was easy for her because there were a group of students from her high school who were all there, “So we stuck together and dormed together.” She said she does not recall exactly what classes she took but remembers they were easy and she had a lot of time to relax and have fun with friends. The more difficult time for her was her second semester when she was placed on academic probation. She said she had gotten a job at a local amusement park and was not prioritizing her academics. She explained, “I was very bad at time management and kind of just gave up on a few of my classes.” Julia never told anyone she had been placed on academic probation, she simply just started studying more and prioritizing her time. Julia graduated from Cal State Ocean Bay 2

years ago and is currently working on her master's degree in education. She is living back in El Monte with her family and hopes to be an elementary school teacher in her hometown. "There were a lot of teachers who helped me while growing up, I want to be able to provide that same kind of support to other students," said Julia. Ofelia said she's happy that Julia is back at home and proud of her for following her dreams. Ofelia explained, "*Nunca necesito que nosotros la estuviéramos puchando, ella sola siempre fue consciente de lo que necesitaba que hacer para sobresalir*" (She never needed us to push her, she was always aware of what she had to do to be successful).

### **Julia and Ofelia: Reflection, Advice, Suggestions, and Ideas to Further Support First-Generation Latina College Graduate Success**

Ofelia said she loves going to school workshops because with time they keep getting better and better. She explained, "*Las juntas de ahora son muy suave hasta nos ponen café y pan dulce por si acaso estamos cansados*" (The meetings we have nowadays are very cool because they give us coffee and sweet bread in case we are tired). Ofelia said that she has always tried to attend all workshops and meetings at her daughter's school because "*así estoy al tanto de cómo van mis hijas y me entero de que hay de nuevo en la escuela*" (that way I can be aware of how my daughters are doing and figure out what is new at the school). Ofelia said that most of the workshops she has attended are in Spanish because a majority of the parents who attend are Spanish-speaking. Unfortunately, she also said that not too many people attend these workshops which is a shame because they are very informative.

*Normalmente las juntas de la escuela son a las 8 de la mañana y no hay en la tarde. La verdad es muy triste porque van muy poquitos padres a las juntas. Yo creo que es porque todos tienen que trabajar. En mi opinión estuviera bien que también hicieran las juntas en las tardes porque aquí todo el mundo trabaja... estuviera bien que fueran las juntas como a las siete para que no tuvieran pendiente los padres de ir a trabajar.*

(Normally school meetings are at 8 in the morning and there is no afternoon session. The truth is it's very sad because very few parents go to meetings. I think it is because everyone must work. In my opinion it would be good idea that they also have meetings in the afternoon because everyone here works ... it would be good if the meetings were at about seven so that the parents did not have to worry about going to work.)

Ofelia has made a conscious effort to attend all meeting held at child's school; however she admits that this is easier for her because she does not have a steady job. She suggests that meetings be held both in the morning and evening to give working parents more options and hopefully be more willing to attend.

Julia agreed with her mom also and said it is extremely important that parents be involved and know what is going on in their child's education. Although her mom said that she went to all the meeting she could, Julia still expressed frustration with her parents. Julia said, "My parents did not understand what was going on. My home life was completely different than my school life. Schools really need to figure out a way to help bridge these two worlds for first-generation students." Julia said that once she left to Cal State Ocean Bay, her parents were happy, but did not know what going to college entailed. Her parents would proudly say, "*Mi hija se fue a la universidad*" (My daughter left to college). However, according to Julia, "They did not even know what that meant!" She said that she always tried to explain to her parents what she was doing, but most times did not know how to translate the words to Spanish. Julia explained that she thought it would be more helpful if someone who was more versed in the language could explain what she was doing to her parents. She said, "It's one thing for me to try to explain to my parents what I'm doing versus a professional. They are more likely to listen to the expert." Julia admits that had her parents better understood what the college process was like perhaps her parents could have been more supportive during her transition to college.

Julia currently works as a teacher's aide at an elementary school in El Monte. Something she thinks would really help students is a female empowerment group in the elementary schools. She says that girls need to have a safe space to express themselves and explained that she found this with several teachers during high school, but now thinks it would be even more helpful in the elementary schools.

I think a female empowerment group at the elementary level would be helpful because it is something I haven't seen and know students would enjoy. The fact is that students really need to reach out to teachers because ultimately that's what helped me the most.

Julia credits the positive relationships she had with her teachers as one of the main factors that helped her get into college and would like to see this happen at an earlier age. As a future teacher, Julia says that she wants to help other students from El Monte get into college the same way she was helped while growing up. Nevertheless, both Julia and her mother agree that the only way this can happen is if both parents and students are on board. So, according to both Julia and Ofelia, it is important to include parents in the discussion of not only what it takes to get into college, but also what happens once your daughter or son is in college. These workshops should also accommodate the type of community they serve and be in Spanish and at times where most parents are not at work. All in all, Julia and Ofelia want parents and schools to work together in a more inclusive manner for the benefit of all children, especially first-generation Latinas.

## **Conclusion**

Five findings emerged from the narratives of the individuals who participated in this study: *Stories of Struggles*, *Unconditional Support*, *Additional Academic Support Outside of the Family*, *College Persistence*, and *They Just Don't Get It*. These findings reflect the educational trajectory of first-generation college graduates and the support their immigrant mothers provided in their quest to acquire a higher education. The narratives show that although all the college

graduates in this study came from a very low-income, high-poverty community, they were still able to obtain a college degree, regardless of their surroundings. The data also reflected that although their mothers lacked a higher education they prided themselves in trying to support their daughters in acquiring a college diploma. The data revealed that even though the mothers were not able to provide academic support at home, in terms of being able to help with an essay, math homework, or college applications, the college graduates tried to fill this void by participating in pre-college programs or seeking mentors and teachers who could help them outside of the home. All study participants acknowledged that schools and communities need to be more aware and inclusive of the families they serve and work together to better support first-generation Latinas in attaining a higher education.



## CHAPTER V: Discussion

This chapter begins by revisiting the research questions and theoretical framework guiding this study. Afterwards, the five key findings as presented in Chapter IV—(a) Stories of Struggle, (b) Unconditional Support, (c) Additional Academic Support Outside of the Family, (d) College Persistence, and (e) They Just Don't Get It—will be discussed and connected to the narratives of each participant for implications and recommendations. Lastly, I will conclude by sharing the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research.

### Revisiting the Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

This study began with the premise that Latinas will soon make up a large segment of the U.S. population, and more needs to be done to further support the educational attainment of all first-generation Latinas who pursue post-secondary educational opportunities. Although Latinas are going to college at higher rates than ever before, the rate of college matriculation is nowhere near that of their White counterparts (Fry & Lopez, 2012; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006).

This study sought to explore how the varying narratives of both the first-generation Latina college graduates and their immigrant mothers can help community and educational leaders support Latinas obtaining a college degree. Therefore, I used Chicana/Latina feminist theory, which is grounded on Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) idea of the *mestiza consciousness*, to illuminate the ways the stories of these participants can be used to gain insight to the unique challenges and struggles of Latinas in their pursuit of a higher education. The lived experiences of Chicanas/Latinas in this study can serve as tools to help other Chicanas/Latinas, as well as many other people of color, to overcome barriers in their educational journeys. By using the narratives of both the first-generation college students and their mothers, I sought to answer the following two research questions.

1. How do first-generation Latina college graduates understand their educational journey and academic achievements? How do their immigrant mothers understand their daughter's educational journey and academic achievements? How, if at all, do these understandings differ?
2. Based on their own experiences what advice, suggestions, or ideas can first-generation Latina college graduates and their immigrant mothers provide to community and educational leaders to strengthen the educational trajectories of Latinas and their families?

Based on these two research questions, each participant shared how she saw or understood her interactions with families and other individuals or programs that shaped the college graduate's educational journey. The combined narratives of both mother and daughter serve to provide educational and community leaders with recommendations to further support communities of color. The data shows that similar to the literature review in Chapter II, first-generation Latinas have a more difficult time trying to obtain a college degree when compared to second and third generation Latinas (Suro, 2003). Although Latinas are attending college at higher rates than ever before, it is not without struggle or sacrifice. On the contrary, the research shows that families and Latino/a parent engagement play a significant role in this increase (Fitts & McClure, 2015; B. Sánchez et al., 2006). By highlighting the strengths and unique experiences of the each participant in this study, educational and community leaders can use these narratives to uplift the Chicano/Latino community and further support Latinas who want to obtain a higher education (Villenas et al., 2006). Therefore, based on both the college graduate and her mother's perspective, the research questions serve to illuminate what needs to be done to help other first-generation Latinas obtain a higher education.

## Discussion of Key Findings

When each participant in this study was asked to explain the educational journey and academic achievements of the college graduates, she shared her own story that illustrated the college graduate's path to a higher education. For these women, the academic journey toward obtaining a college degree was centered on how to obtain a college degree versus whether college was for them. Their high level of academic achievement and commitment to education was demonstrated in countless awards, scholarships, and acceptances to various institutions of higher education across the country. Although the narrative of these women represented a range of experiences and educational pathways, a set of common themes emerged across the academic journey of these women. These themes served as the key findings of this research.

**Finding I: Stories of struggle: Struggle was used as a motivation to acquire a higher education by first-generation Latinas.** Immigrant mothers share their personal stories of struggles with their daughters to encourage their daughters to continue with their educational pursuits. Each immigrant mother in the study discussed how she used their personal life journey as an example of what she did not want her daughter to be or do with her own life. For example, Zenaida, a single mother of two, said that she would tell her daughters everything, in detail, about what she went through when immigrating to the United States. Zenaida described the multiple times she was raped and remind her daughters that the opportunities they have to academically succeed are a result of her sacrifice. Zenaida said she was very specific and would say *“Yo no tengo riquezas. Lo único que les puedo decir es que aquí no hay herencia”* (I don't have money. The only thing I can tell you is that there is no inheritance here). She reminded them that she was a mirror of what they should not be in life and told them that their trailer was not a home. Their trailer simply provided shelter so that they would not be on the street. Another

mother in the study, Daniela, also described to her children the deplorable working conditions that she had to endure in a garment factory to provide for her family. She would constantly remind them “*que yo no quería que pasaran por lo que yo pasé*” (that I did not want them to go through what I had gone through), with the hope that they would want and study for more in their own lives.

By using their personal narratives of struggle these mothers connected and related to their daughters in meaningful ways. Yosso (2005) confirms in her research that storytelling is beneficial to communities of color because it nurtures and inspires students of color to succeed. Anzaldúa (1987) argued that it is stories of Latinas/Chicanas like these that will help the next generation of Latinas/Chicanas from “being a slave, a source of cheap labor...invisible and unheard” (p. 44 ). These stories of struggle need to be shared as a reminder of what Latina immigrant women have gone through and are capable of enduring. Anzaldúa claims that women of color have been excluded from the dominant discourse of life and struggle in the U.S., and I argue that the stories and narratives of the women in this study are important to the fabric of American life and can serve to uplift not only Latino/Chicano communities, but also other communities of color.

**Finding II: Unconditional support: Mothers will support daughters at all costs.**

Although none of the immigrant mothers in the study had the opportunity to obtain a higher education in their home country or in the United States, each one supported her daughter in her quest to obtain a college degree. Six of the seven mothers in this study said they made the education of their daughters a priority and did absolutely everything they could to support their daughter’s academic journeys. Only one mother, Zenaida, was unable to support her daughter the way she wanted. She indicated that her lack of support was a result of having to work and

provide for her family as a single mother. Nonetheless, the theme of unconditional support was seen in multiple ways throughout the narratives. Despite their lack of formal education, all the mothers supported their daughters acquiring a college degree. Unconditional support manifested itself in the narratives in six various ways: words of wisdom, sacrificial support, transportation, project support, attendance at school events, and financial support.

For example, one mother, Maria, has personally taken her daughter, Jessica, a warm homemade lunch everyday since the second grade. Maria said that a teacher once told her that students are better able to focus and concentrate with a full stomach. Once Jessica was in college, Maria would also spend her Sundays preparing meals for the week so her daughter could take them with her to college. Maria said that her own mother had done the same while she was in school so she felt she owed it to Jessica. Besides, “*Era la forma en la que yo le podía ayudar, porque yo no estoy preparada, yo no sé Inglés*” (It was the way I could help her, because I am not educated, I do not speak English). Maria explained that because she lacked an education, she tried to provide a different type of support for her daughter. Maria saw that Jessica was preoccupied with extracurricular activities and advanced courses that she wanted to support her in the only way she felt capable, by cooking a warm meal.

Another mother, Catalina, gave her daughter, Nancy, \$2,500 to help her transition into a new apartment after graduating from college. Nancy’s dad refused to give his daughter the money because he wanted her to go back home after she graduated. Catalina does not have a steady job and simply saved the \$50 her husband gives her every 2 weeks for several years before gifting the money to Nancy. When asked, Catalina said “*No se preocupen pídame a mi yo siempre tengo [dinero]*” (Don’t worry, ask me, I always have [money]).

Despite not having a formal education themselves, all the mothers in this study wanted their daughters to acquire a higher education and did what they could to support their educational endeavors. In addition, their support did not go unnoticed because all the college graduates in this study acknowledged that this support helped them in one way or another. Consistent with previous research (Espinoza-Herold, 2007), the mothers in this study were the driving force behind their daughters' academic success. In Gandara's (1982) seminal study of 17 Latinas who obtained a higher education, the data revealed that the mothers had been extremely influential in their daughters' educational journey, but Gandara did not specify how. Nevertheless, in this study, both the mother and daughter narratives provide concrete examples of how the students felt supported academically in their post-secondary endeavors.

The narratives of this study reveal that although the mothers did not have a high level of education or have fluency with the English language, they supported their daughters academically. Three of the seven college graduates said they would have liked it if their mothers could have helped them more, but were aware that their mothers did not know how. This lack of family capital with regard to knowledge about the college-going process leads to finding number three; students sought additional academic support outside the family.

**Finding III: Additional academic support outside the family: First-generation Latinas rely on intervention programs for academic support.** Pre-college intervention programs and mentors play a critical role in the long-term educational trajectories of low-income, first-generation, students of color. For example, the Latina college graduates in this study said they understood their homes were lacking the college and career support that was necessary for them to move ahead. Consequently, all of them found other ways to fill this void through outside mentors, pre-college programs, clubs, sports, and advanced courses. Research

suggests that there are currently several intervention programs for students of color that have proven to be very successful. These programs include federally funded TRIO programs such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and GEAR-UP (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a). The college graduates in this study all had at least one form of outside academic support that they claimed was extremely helpful in their quest to obtain a college education.

Julia said that had it not been for AVID or the exceptional teachers she had during elementary, middle, and high school, she most likely would not have gone on to college. All the students in the study spoke about the importance of having mentors, teachers, or other adults helping them when deciding to attend and apply to college. Students depend on outside programs to supplement what they do not have at home. For example, Juanita said that she was grateful when Victoria's mentor would take her to fancy restaurants, museums, and plays because that was something she could never afford to do with her children. As a participant in the Partnership Scholars Program, Victoria was given a mentor for 6 years starting in middle school. Her mentor treated Victoria like his own daughter and took her on various trips and excursions similar to what a typical middle class family would experience. On two occasions, Victoria's mentor even took her on vacation to New York and Europe. Similar to Victoria, Marisol also had the opportunity to see a world outside of El Monte and visited dozens of universities across the country as a student in Upward Bound. Marisol was also able to go to various plays, restaurants, and even a camping trip in the desert because of Upward Bound. As the daughter of a single mom who could barely afford rent, these excursions helped Marisol recognize that there was more to life than what her mother could provide.

Although the participant narratives did not provide a clear distinction as to what the college graduates found more helpful, their mothers or the support they received from outside

programs, it is obvious that without the outside support of intervention programs and mentors, none of the women in this study would have been able to experience a world outside of the one their families could afford. The student narratives showed that it is important to develop practices that foster meaningful student and teacher/adult relationships that promote a college going culture.

**Finding IV: College persistence: First-generation Latinas must cultivate individual resiliency to persevere in college.** All the college graduates in this study expressed that their college experiences were difficult because they were no longer getting familial or outside support, like they had in high school, middle school, and in some cases elementary school. They all explained that no one in their immediate families could help them when they transitioned to college because they did not know how. For the most part, except for two participants, they were the first and only individuals in their immediate families to apply to and attend a 4-year university. In addition, all the college graduates expressed that attending college was also challenging because they did not know what to expect once they enrolled into their respective 4-year universities. In each narrative, the students expressed that they were either overwhelmed with work, homesick, or felt guilty for leaving their families. As first-generation college-bound students, they had to build an attitude of resiliency because their previous support systems had been taken away. Similarly, three of the mothers in the study explained in their narratives that once their daughters left to college they took a step back because they no longer knew how to provide support for their daughters. To both the mothers and the daughters in this study, college was a foreign entity that required these students to find an inner strength to finish and graduate. In three cases, college was so overwhelming that they seriously considered dropping out during their first year, but said they found an inner power to persevere and graduate.



The research shows that although Latinas are applying to and attending college at higher rates than Latinos, it is not without sacrifice and struggle (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). According to the literature, when first-generation Latinas leave for college they experience homesickness at higher levels than second or third-generation Latinas. The literature also reveals that first-generation Latinas who leave for college feel like they have more familial obligations they must attend to than second or third-generation Latinas (K. González et al., 2004). The feeling of insurmountable guilt due to leaving to college was evident in 57% of the college graduate narratives from this study. For example, after leaving for UC Bayview, Elizabeth stopped communicating with her family because she was engulfed with work and said she was constantly studying to try to stay afloat with the demands of her coursework. When her mom would call to catch up on the phone, Elizabeth would end the calls abruptly and tell her mother that she was busy. After a few weeks, Elizabeth's mom stopped calling. Elizabeth admitted that their fallout was her fault because she never told her mom how overwhelmed she was at UC Bayview. To this day, Elizabeth still feels guilty about her broken relationship with her mom, but has vowed to make it up to her before transitioning to her new job. Similar to Elizabeth, Nancy also explained that attending Wiltern College changed who she was and what she now enjoys in life. Nancy explained that she loves to travel, eat healthy food, and experience the finer things in life, something her family would never understand nor would she ever share with them. At one point Nancy was trying to convince her sister Elena to also study on the East Coast, but Elena told her, "You don't know what it was like for our family when you left. Unlike you, I would never do that to our parents." Nancy said her sister's statement hurt her feelings more than anyone will ever know.

Each college graduate shared that her college experience was fundamental in her development as a scholar because she did it on her own. Five of the seven college graduate participants said that they never told their parents what was happening during their first semester in college because they assumed their parents would not understand. The research also shows that this is common among first-generation Latina students because they are the least likely group to seek professional help once in college. For the most part, according to the literature, first-generation Latina students tend to draw upon their past lived experiences when dealing with problems (Gloria et al., 2005). The participants in this study explained that they just kept going regardless of their homesickness and in three cases even depression. This finding illuminates the notion that education and community leaders need to create support structures for first-generation college bound students in order to ease their transition and help them graduate from college.

**Finding V: They just don't get it: There is a misalignment between immigrant family expectations and the U.S. educational system.** Without exception, the college graduates in this study indicated that they struggled during their educational journeys because their families did not completely understand how the educational system worked in this country. The student narratives in this study show that there is a mismatch in Latino/a parents understanding the requirements to obtain a college degree and the prestige that certain universities hold. The theme of *they just don't get it* is captured in the narratives with examples of four broad areas: gender stereotypes, machismo, language barriers, and an overall not understanding of US higher education system in the United States.

The literature confirms that many times Latino/a families feel excluded from their child's school because of language barriers or socioeconomic status (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). In this

study, the college graduates explained that although several of the mother participants attended school workshops and meetings they still did not understand how to navigate the K-12 system to best prepare their daughters for post-secondary options. For example, six of the seven college participants in this study said they had to defend their participation in clubs and activities during high school because their parents did not understand why they were important. In addition, four out of the seven students also explained that their families general lack of understanding stemmed from their fathers' *machista* perspective. Nancy said that her father tried to convince her to stay and said young women could only leave their homes once they were married. Nancy said that her father tried to make her feel guilty by telling her that she was abandoning her family and should not leave to college. Similarly, Victoria also said that her father told her she was being ignorant and should choose a university that was closer to their home. Elizabeth also said that her father told to go a nearby junior college instead of the other extremely competitive universities to which she had been accepted. In all three cases, these fathers did not understand that certain universities have more prestige and in the long run can be more beneficial career wise. Nancy, Victoria, and Elizabeth had to defend their academic decisions against their fathers, but this was not necessarily the case with their mothers. All the participants in the study said their mother's supported their academic decisions even if it meant having to move away from home. All the mothers in the study also said that they trusted their daughters and their educational choices, but sometimes they just did not understand the process or rationale.

The narratives in this study illuminate how immigrant parents do not understand the process of getting into a university in the U.S., or the prestige that certain universities hold over others. This key finding serves to show how important it is to form relationships with both

students and families to better educate and support first-generation students who are trying to obtain a college degree.

### **Significance of Findings: Implications and Recommendations**

The narratives of these participants shed light on the five key findings that affected each Latina college graduate's academic journey toward obtaining a higher education. There was no clear distinction in the data that one finding was more influential than another, meaning that according to both the mothers and daughters in this study, all five key findings were equally important. It was also not surprising to learn that pre-college programs and mentors were a significant part of each college graduate's educational trajectory. All the college graduates in the study recognized that their mothers were not knowledgeable about post-secondary options in the United States, but were not resentful because of this lack of knowledge. If anything, the data showed that the college graduates tried to fill this void by looking for additional academic support outside the home. The insight gained from this study has three implications for educational and community leaders who aim to support first-generation Latina students and other students of color more broadly.

**Support parental engagement in and knowledge of the U.S. education system.** When immigrant families arrive in the United States, they come with high educational aspirations for their children. However, after a generation or two, studies show that the dream of obtaining a college degree decreases for Latinos (Hill & Torres, 2010). Despite the decline in Latino/a educational attainment, Latino/a parents still want their children to obtain a higher education. As seen with the narratives in this study, Latina immigrant mothers will support their daughters unconditionally, with the hope that they can acquire a college diploma.

This study emphasizes the stories of first-generation Latinas who went to great lengths to obtain a college education. The graduates in this study shared their stories with the hope that more Latinas will be able to obtain a higher education. The young Latinas in this study also explained that they wanted their families to learn more about the educational attainment process here in the United States, but became frustrated with language barriers and their own parents' lack of education and understanding about how to acquire a college degree.

If school and community leaders want to support the educational attainment of first-generation Latina students, then they need to evaluate what they are doing to be inclusive of all families of color. Schools and communities need to come together to create intentional and purposeful relationships with not only students, but also their families. Research shows that family plays a critical role in the educational attainment of all students, especially Latino/a students (Fitts & McClure, 2015; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; B. Sánchez et al., 2006). Time and time again, the mothers and daughters in this study explained that school workshops can be very informative, but are useless if they are not conducted in parents' home language. Mothers and daughters also expressed that schools need to be aware that many immigrant families work long hours and are not available for 9AM meetings during the school week. Instead, both mothers and daughters suggest that workshops be provided in the evening or on the weekend to better accommodate working families. Several participants also recommended that schools invite college graduates who also grew up in El Monte to show both students and families that anyone can go to college and demographics do not determine destiny.

The mothers and the daughters in this study claimed that parent involvement and engagement were important aspects of the college graduates' educational journeys. So, in order to further develop a relationship between schools, families, and communities, it is important to

create meaningful connections and be understanding of the needs of all stakeholders. As the data reveal in the narratives, students and mothers want to be more involved in school; they just need to feel accepted and welcomed in the process. When schools and communities are intentionally creating spaces where families are free to ask questions and learn about our current system of education in the United States in their own language, they are more motivated to help their children obtain a higher education.

**Provide mentors and pre-college program opportunities and information.** First-generation Latina students lack the knowledge and expertise of applying to and attending a 4-year institution. Five out of seven of the college graduates in this study were the first in their immediate families to apply to and attend a 4-year university. All the college graduates in the study claimed that had it not been for mentors, teachers, counselors, or their involvement in a pre-college program, they would have not applied to or attended college.

The literature shows that mentors, pre-college programs, and exposure play a fundamental role in accessing information regarding a higher education that otherwise would not be available for first-generation Latino/a students (K. González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; B. Sánchez et al., 2006). If educational and community leaders want to help first-generation Latina scholars obtain a higher education, it is imperative that intervention and support programs like Upward Bound, AVID, GEAR-UP, and the Partnership Scholars Program continue to be funded and promoted with all first-generation students of color and their families. Educational and community leaders need to make it a priority to create and develop relationships with both individuals and programs that can provide first-generation Latina students with the academic support and expertise they are lacking at home.

**Creating K-16 academic support systems for students and families.** When first-generation Latina students apply to, are accepted at, and leave for college, they are often without the fundamental support system they once had both at home and high school. Studies show that once first-generation Latinas leave for college, they have a more difficult time transitioning than their male counterparts (K. González et al., 2004). First-generation Latina scholars have the added pressure of family obligations once they leave for college, which can potentially be damaging to their academic performance (Sy, 2006). In order to fully support first-generation Latina students in their quest to obtain a higher education, it is imperative that educational and community leaders build relationships with institutions of higher education to create systemic programs that will support first-generation Latina students once they are in college. First-generation Latinas and their families need to know and learn how to handle the culture shock that most first-generation students of color face when entering college. All the mothers in this study said they felt incapable of helping their daughters once in college because they did not know how. If secondary schools and institutions of higher education work together, they can develop transitional programs for newly admitted first-generation Latinas and their families.

### **Limitations**

This study was designed to better understand the educational trajectories of first-generation Latina college graduates and the support their immigrant mothers provided in their quest to obtain a higher education. The common themes among the narratives lend credibility to the study's findings. Nevertheless, as with any study there are several limitations worth noting. First, the data came from students who graduated from the El Monte Union High School District and cannot necessarily be considered representative of patterns nationwide. Secondly, given the very specific purpose of the research, there are limitations due to the small sample size, which

may not reflect the experiences of all first-generation Latina college graduates and their mothers. Lastly, the study asked participants to reflect on their own personal experiences, and many individuals have selective memory in terms of what they remember. During their individual *pláticas*, the participants could have exaggerated or made events or memories more significant than what they really were.

### **Dissemination**

Research shows that storytelling is one of the most effective ways to relay information (Ceja, 2006). The purpose of this study is to further help first-generation Latina students and their families acquire a higher education by sharing the lessons learned from a small group of Latinas who were resilient and persistent in their pursuit of a college education. The data from this study are being used to host parent, student, and community workshops. The findings and narratives are being shared with community members via a simple and interactive PowerPoint presentation. Workshop participants are being asked how they relate to the short narratives and reflect on what they are currently doing to help their children acquire a higher education. So far, over 200 parents and community members have participated in five workshops that depict the narratives of this study's participants throughout the San Gabriel Valley. Workshop evaluations have all been positive, and I am currently scheduling more parent and community workshops for the summer and fall at elementary, middle schools, and high schools.

### **Future Research**

It would also be beneficial to follow up with the fathers and siblings of the participants in this study to see if their perspectives on how the college graduates obtained a higher education correlate with the mothers and daughters of the study. In addition, it would also be valuable to



compare the data to other first-generation non-college graduates and see how their narratives and potentially their mothers' narratives compare to the data in this study.

## **Conclusion**

Supporting first-generation Latina students getting into and graduating from college should be considered one of the most urgent issues in education today. Since Latinas are the fastest growing population in the United States, our country cannot afford to under-educate them without experiencing serious consequences related to our economic viability. College access and retention for Latina students is only one part of a larger goal. This study shows that the key for first-generation Latina students, especially those coming from immigrant families, obtaining a higher education comes from a combined support of both family and other nonfamily supports like pre-college programs and mentors. It is clear from the data in this study that students, families, schools, and communities need to work together to better understand where first-generation Latina students and their families stand in order to better support and fulfill their academic needs. The stories of both the mothers and the daughters in this study illuminate that first-generation Latina college graduates obtained a higher education because their families were able to immigrate and incorporate themselves into the United States and support their daughters. However, another significant contribution to these young women acquiring a college degree were adults outside their family who mentored them either one-on-one or through an institutional pre-college setting. This study contributes important insights regarding how educational and community leaders must step up their efforts and identify systemic ways to support first-generation Latina students in obtaining a higher education. The narratives in this study provide key recommendations and valuable knowledge that will help schools and communities do a

better job in supporting first-generation Latina students and their families, as well as other students and families of color.

## APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol for College Graduates and Their Mothers

The objective of these semi-structured interviews is to study the academic relationship between Latina mothers and daughters. Data is being collected to measure the impact of mother's and female guardians to the academic lives of Latina students. This study will examine the way Latina students see how their mothers support them during their academic journeys towards a higher education. After the initial interview all participants will be given a \$10 gift card to Starbucks.

### Initial Interview Questions for College Graduates

- 1) Opening:** Please tell me about yourself. Who are you? Where is your family from? What do your parents and siblings do?
  - Follow-Up:** Was obtaining a higher education important in your home? Why or why not?
  - Follow-Up:** How far did your parents get in terms of schooling? What about your siblings?
  - Follow-Up:** Why did you choose to obtain a higher education? What role did your mother play in this decision?
- 2) Introduction:** One of the criteria for participating in this study is that your mother also participate. Please tell me about some of the important lessons, regarding your education, your mother has taught you.
  - Follow-Up:** Why were these lessons important? How did they impact your educational trajectory?
  - Follow-Up:** Did your mother and you ever disagree about your academic decisions? What happened? How did you resolve these disagreements?
- 3) Key:** Tell me about a few of the ways your mother has helped you do well in school.
  - Follow-Up:** How did [specific previous examples] help shape your educational journey and goals?
- 4) Key:** Now, let's think about when you were in elementary and middle school. What is one of your earliest educational memories? What role did your mother play in this memory?
  - Follow-Up:** Why was this memory important? How did it shape your educational career?
- 5) Key:** Think back to homework and projects during your time in elementary, middle school, and high school. What role did your mother play in helping you get these assignments done? Did she help you? If so, how? If not, why not?
  - Follow-Up:** What were you most proud of academically during this time?
  - Follow-Up:** What were you most disappointed of during this time?
  - Follow-Up:** Describe the role your mother played in this success and disappointment?
- 6) Key:** Now let's talk about how to be successful in high school. What classes and or activities were you involved in during this time?

**Follow-Up:** How did these classes and/or clubs help prepare you for college?

**Follow-Up:** What role did your mother play in terms of your participation in these classes/clubs?

**Follow-Up:** What were your most difficult courses in high school? How did your mother help you do well in these courses?

**7) Key:** Now let's talk about college. What do you remember about the college application process? What role did your mother play in this process?

**Follow-Up:** How many colleges did you apply to? Where were they located? Did your mother have any influence over these decisions? Why or why not?

**Follow-Up:** How did you decide what college you were going to attend? Did your mother have any influence over this decision? Why or why not?

**Follow-Up:** What do you remember about your first semester/quarter in college? Was it an easy or difficult transition? What role did your mother play in this transition?

**8) Key:** How has your mother helped you be successful in your academic career?

**Follow-Up:** What would she specifically tell you? What would she specifically do? How did these actions help you?

**9) Key:** Suppose your friend's mom asked you for help. She wants to know what she can do to help your friend succeed academically. What would you say to her? How would you help her?

**Follow-Up:** Why do you think Latina mothers/guardians can play an important role in the lives of their Latina daughters?

**10) Ending:** I am trying to figure out how Latina mothers help their daughters succeed in school and make good academic decisions. What do you think is the most important thing your mother has taught you in relation to your academic achievements?

**11) Final Question:** Is there anything else that we should have talked about but didn't? Is there anything else you can tell me about the role your mother has played in your education?

### **Follow-Up Interview Question for College Graduates**

**1) Key:** Based on your own experience as a first-generation Latina college graduate what lessons, ideas, or suggestions can you provide to educational leaders, schools, and communities to further support other Latinas to wish to also obtain a college degree?

### **Initial Interview Questions for Mothers**

**1) Opening:** Please tell me about yourself. Who are you? Where is your family from? What do you do?

**Follow-Up:** Was obtaining a higher education important in your home? Why or why not?

**Follow-Up:** How far did your parents get in terms of schooling? What about your siblings?

**Follow-Up:** Why did you choose not to obtain a higher education? What role did your own mother play in this decision?

**2) Introduction:** One of the criteria for your daughter to participate in this study was for you to participate as well. Please tell me about some of the important lessons, regarding your daughter's education, you have taught her.

**Follow-Up:** Why were these lessons important? How did they impact your daughter's educational trajectory?

**Follow-Up:** Did you and your daughter ever disagree about her academic decisions? What happened? How did you resolve these disagreements?

**3) Key:** Tell me about a few of the ways you have helped your daughter do well in school.

**Follow-Up:** How did [specific previous examples] help shape her educational journey and goals?

**4) Key:** Now, let's think about when your daughter was in elementary and middle school. What is one of your earliest educational memories with her? What role did you play in this memory?

**Follow-Up:** Why was this memory important? How did it shape her educational career?

**5) Key:** Think back to homework and projects during your daughter's time in elementary, middle school, and high school. What role did you play in helping your daughter get these assignments done? Did you help her? If so, how? If not, why not?

**Follow-Up:** What were you most proud of your daughter academically during this time?

**Follow-Up:** What were you most disappointed of your daughter during this time?

**Follow-Up:** Describe the role you played in this success and disappointment?

**6) Key:** Now let's talk about how your daughter was successful in high school. What classes and or activities was she involved in during this time?

**Follow-Up:** How did these classes and/or clubs help prepare her for college?

**Follow-Up:** What role did you play in terms of her participation in these classes/clubs?

**Follow-Up:** What were her most difficult courses in high school? How did you help her do well in these courses?

**7) Key:** Now let's talk about college. What do you remember about the college application process your daughter went through? What role did you play in this process for your daughter?

**Follow-Up:** How many colleges did your daughter apply to? Where were they located?

Did you have any influence over these decisions? Why or why not?

**Follow-Up:** How did you help your daughter decide what college she was going to attend? Did you have any influence over this decision? Why or why not?

**Follow-Up:** What do you remember about your daughter's first semester/quarter in college? Was it an easy or difficult transition for her? What role did you play in this transition?

**8) Key:** How have you helped your daughter be successful in her academic career?

**Follow-Up:** What would you specifically tell her? What would you specifically do? How did these actions help your daughter?

**9) Key:** Suppose your friend, who also has a young daughter, asked you for help. She wants to know what she can do to help her own daughter succeed academically. What would you say to her? How would you help her?

**Follow-Up:** Why do you think Latina mothers/guardians can play an important role in the lives of their Latina daughters?

**10) Ending:** I am trying to figure out how Latina mothers tend to help their daughters succeed in school and make good academic decisions. What do you think is the most important thing you have taught your daughter in relation to her academic achievements?

**11) Final Question:** Is there anything else that we should have talked about but didn't? Is there anything else you can tell me about the role you have played in your daughter's education?

### **Follow-Up Interview Question for Mothers**

**1) Key:** Based on your own experience as the mother of a first-generation Latina college graduate what lessons, ideas, or suggestions can you provide to educational leaders, schools, and communities to further support other Latinas who wish to also obtain a college degree?

### **Preguntas iniciales de entrevista para las madres**

**1) Inicio:** Por favor hableme sobre usted. ¿Quién es usted? ¿De donde es su familia? ¿En donde o en que trabaja?

**Seguir:** ¿En su hogar fue importante ir a la universidad? ¿Por qué o por qué no?

**Seguir:** ¿Hasta qué punto fueron sus padres a la escuela? ¿Y sus hermanos?

**Seguir:** ¿Por qué usted no obtuvo una carrera académica? ¿Qué rol jugó su mamá o papá en usted no seguir con la escuela?

**2. Introducción:** Uno de los criterios para participar en este estudio fue que usted y su hija fueran entrevistadas. Por favor cuénteme de los consejos importantes, a cerca de la educación de \_\_\_\_\_ (su hija), que usted le ha enseñado.

**Seguir:** ¿Por qué son importantes estos consejos? ¿Cómo impactaron la educación de su hija?

**Seguir:** ¿Usted y su hija siempre han estado de acuerdo con las decisiones académicas que ella ha hecho? ¿Qué pasó? ¿Cómo resolvieron estos desacuerdos?

**3) Clave:** Cuénteme algunas de las formas en que usted le ha ayudado a su hija ser exitosa en la escuela.

**Seguir:** ¿Cómo cree que [ejemplos anteriores] le ayudaron a \_\_\_\_\_ (su hija) seguir con su educación?

**4) Clave:** Ahora, quiero que se recuerde de cuando su hija estaba en la escuela primaria y secundaria ya sea la "elementary" o la "middle school." ¿Cuál es uno de sus recuerdos más tempranos que tiene de ella en la escuela? ¿Qué rol jugó usted en esta memoria?

**Seguir:** ¿Por qué cree que esta memoria era importante? ¿Cómo formo parte esta memoria de la carrera educativa de su hija?

**5) Clave:** Ahora piense en las tareas y proyectos de su hija durante la escuela primaria, secundaria, y preparatoria. ¿Qué rol/papel juego usted en ayudarle a terminar estas tareas o proyectos? ¿Usted le ayudo? ¿Si o no? ¿Por qué?

**Seguir:** ¿De qué estaba más orgullosa de su hija académicamente durante este tiempo?

**Seguir:** ¿De qué estaba más decepcionada de su hija durante este tiempo?

**Seguir:** Describa el rol/papel que usted jugó en este éxito y esta decepción.

**6) Clave:** Ahora vamos a platicar de cómo su hija fue un éxito en la escuela secundaria. ¿Qué cursos y que tipo de actividades estaba involucrada ella durante este tiempo?

**Seguir:** ¿Usted piensa que estos cursos y/o clubes le ayudaron a prepararse para la universidad? ¿Si o no? ¿Por qué?

**Seguir:** ¿Qué rol jugo usted para que su hija participara en estas clases/clubes?

**Seguir:** ¿Usted se acuerda cuáles fueron los cursos más difíciles en la escuela secundaria para su hija? ¿Cómo le ayudó usted a que su hija sobresaliera estos cursos?

**7) Clave:** Ahora vamos a hablar acerca de la universidad. ¿Qué recuerda sobre el proceso de aplicaciones a la universidad de su hija? ¿Qué papel jugo usted en este proceso para su hija?

**Seguir:** ¿Usted se acuerda a cuántas universidades aplico su hija? ¿Dónde estaban estas universidades? ¿Tuvo alguna influencia usted sobre estas decisiones? ¿Por qué o por qué no?

**Seguir:** ¿Cómo ayudó a su hija a decidir a cuál universidad iba a ir? ¿Usted tuvo alguna influencia sobre esta decisión? ¿Por qué o por qué no?

**Seguir:** ¿Qué recuerda de los primeros meses que estuvo su hija en la universidad? ¿Usted sabe si fue una transición fácil o difícil para ella? ¿Qué rol jugo usted en tratar de ayudarle durante este tiempo?

**8) Clave:** ¿Cómo ha ayudado a su hija tener éxito en su carrera académica?

**Seguir:** ¿Qué le decía específicamente? ¿Qué le hacía específicamente? ¿Cómo cree que estas acciones le ayudaron a su hija?

**9) Clave:** Supongamos que su amiga, que también tiene una hija joven, le pide ayuda. Ella quiere saber cómo le puede ayudar a su propia hija ser exitosa académicamente. ¿Qué le diría a ella? ¿Cómo le ayudaría usted a su amiga?

**Seguir:** ¿Usted cree que las madres latinas tienen un rol importante en la vida de sus hijas latinas? ¿Por qué?

**10) Final:** Estoy tratando de estudiar cómo las madres latinas pueden ayudar a sus hijas ser exitosas en la escuela y tomar buenas decisiones académicas. ¿Qué cree que era lo más importante que le ha enseñado a su hija en relación a sus logros académicos?

**11) pregunta final:** ¿Hay algo más que deberíamos de haber hablado pero no lo hicimos? ¿Hay algo más que me puede contar sobre el papel que usted jugo en la educación de su hija?

### **Pregunta secundaria de entrevista para las madres**

**1) Clave:** En base de su propia experiencia, como una mama de una hija que se ha graduado de la universidad, ¿qué lecciones, ideas, o sugerencias puede proporcionar a líderes educativos, escuelas, y comunidades para apoyar aún más a otras latinas que deseen también ir a la universidad?



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