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A Human Ecological Narrative: Mexican-American Second and Third-Generation Voices of Unheard Mothers and their Influence on their Child's Educational Attainment

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

in

Educational Leadership

by

Monica Ruiz

Committee in charge:

California State University San Marcos

Professor Patricia Prado-Olmos, Chair
Professor Ingrid Flores

University of California San Diego

Professor Megan Hopkins

2021

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Chair

University of California San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2021

DEDICATION

This doctoral journey has been one of tears, fierce dedication, pride, grit and a true passion of finding myself. I would like to first thank the Lord above for guiding me to fulfill a dream that would only be possible through Him with His grace, love, and mercy. It was no coincidence I defended my dissertation on the exact day thirteen years earlier when the Lord granted me a second chance at life with the removal of a malignant tumor.

Mom and Dad, this is for you. I want to begin my gratitude with my dear parents whom I adore, Rene & Olga Ruiz. Dad & Mom thank you for always being my biggest cheerleaders and always believing and supporting my crazy dreams. Having been the only one in my immediate family to go to college and being a first-generation college student, I had to learn to find my way. I had to learn how to navigate a higher educational system so foreign to me; yet, I overcame because of the foundational and unconditional love my parents had for me. My brothers, Arturo (Tutie) and Rene, thank you for your love and support! I love you mom and dad!

Now, onto my daughter, Adriana Renee Garcia. Adriana, you are my reason for living. You are my reason for my doctoral journey. Your life on earth has given my life purpose. You are the gift from God I am so thankful for! Thank you for always cheering me on, telling me not to give up, being my therapist on my melt downs encouraging me by telling me I could finish and overcome. I love you to the moon and back! Remember your life is your oyster and all is possible! I adore you, Corazon!

Chris, the love of my life, thank you, amor. During this entire doctoral journey, we met, dated, had an engagement and married. You believed in my ability to finish successfully and pushed me to do my best. Telling me *chingale*, to keep going by making coffee for me while you

spent many long hours alone waiting for me to write “one more page”. I love you so much and thank you for being by my side every step of the way! Te adoro amor!

To Dra. Jane Clark, thank you, Amiga! I would not have chosen anyone else to go through this journey with. It was the Lord who had our paths cross and together we overcame! Thank you for your encouragement, partnership during our doctoral endeavors! Love you to pieces!

To all my amigas who patiently waited to see me when I was available or had a moment to breathe or just waited for me to completely finish- thank you! Thank you to all in no particular order: Guille, Ledita, Rosana, Juanita, Gaby, Christine, Mandie, Gina, Martha, Monica M. Pam, Diana and Marilyn. A special thank you to Marilyn who taught me leadership with integrity and to always make student-centered decisions. Marilyn also became my unofficial editor and took it on like a champ! Thank you for your unconditional support!

To my homie, Pancho, thank you for your unwavering, ethical leadership and being there every step of the way. Future Dr. Solis, you will change the world!

Lastly, thank you to my committee members, Dr. Megan Hopkins and Dr. Ingrid Flores. Your input, feedback and support was greatly appreciated. To my chair, Dr. Patricia Prado-Olmos, thank you, thank you, and thank you. You never gave up on me. You went over and beyond the call of duty to ensure I was meeting my deadlines and ensured I had a successful defense. I am forever grateful to you. Thank you for everything Dr. Prado-Olmos. I will make you proud!

This journey has come to an end, and for that I am thankful. This is dedicated to all little girls and boys who just need to dream big, because all is possible. Todo se puede!

M.R.L.

EPIGRAPH

"We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community. …Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own." —Cesar Chavez

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VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Human Ecological Narrative: Mexican-American Second- and Third-Generation Voices of Unheard Mothers and their Influence on their Child's Educational Attainment

by

Monica Ruiz

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2021
California State University San Marcos, 2021

Professor Patricia Prado-Olmos, Chair

Educational attainment is not readily available to the fastest-growing minority in the United States: Mexican-Americans and their successive generations. Generational differences in educational achievement are apparent, as Mexican-Americans show limited progress with each successive generation, the only exception being between the first and second generation. Research on family environmental factors for members of successive immigrant generations in

U.S. schools provides relatively insufficient insight on how to prepare to meet the demands of Mexican-American students within the context of their third- or fourth-generational differences. This study was an exploration of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers' influence over their children's educational attainment. The conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory guided a narrative inquiry into the experiences of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and their children.

Keywords: poverty, resilience, opportunities, education, segregation, race/ethnicity, language, inequities, immigrant youth, generational status, generational differences, Latinos, Mexican, Mexican-American

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

According to the Pew Research Center (Krogstad, 2017), in 1860, Mexican-origin Hispanics were the largest Latino group in the United States, with 81.1% of the 155,000 Hispanics of Mexican descent. Growth among the Mexican-American population has created a debate among scholars about the group's educational trajectory, indicating a moral imperative to understand the lack of positive educational outcomes for this group (Fuligni, 1997; Nieto, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Taylor et al., 2009). The debate has stemmed from the systemic, nurtured marginalization and segregation by race, socioeconomic status (SES), and language for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans within the U.S. educational system. Exploring, documenting, and analyzing data to understand how second- and third-generation Mexican-American parents influence their child's educational experience will add to the research on the educational attainment of further generations of Mexican-Americans. Having a better understanding of a life's story and experiences provides a platform for the unheard voices of Mexican-American mothers to emerge through their own words. These findings will add to the current K-12 research on the educational attainment of third- and fourth-generation children. Restorying the lives from second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers provides a humanistic touch and insight into a growing national crisis of the educational stagnation among successive generations.

Generational Differences

To understand the generational differences and educational gaps of Latinos, it is important to first define generational status. First-generation Latinos are born outside the United States or its territories or possessions and can be naturalized U.S. citizens, legal immigrants, or

undocumented immigrants. Generation 1.5 Latinos are foreign-born and brought to the United States as children. The second generation are native-born of foreign-born parents, and the third generation are native-born with native-born parents and are the grandchildren of immigrants (Kao, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005; Salgado, 2015). The expectation is that educational attainment will increase with each successive generation; this is the typical European immigration story (Portes & Rumbaut, 2005). However, the same American Dream does not necessarily hold true for immigrants from Mexico, Central America, or South America. Many factors influence this discrepancy, indicating the need to explore these factors among second- and third-generation Mexican-Americans.

Latinos: A Growing Population

Latinos are the most numerous and most rapidly growing population in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Over the past half-century, the Latino population has increased ninefold, from 6.3 million (3.5% of the U.S. population) in 1960 to 56.5 million (17.6% of the U.S. population) in 2015 (Krogstad, 2017). The immigration of foreign-born Latinos grew from less than one million in 1960 to 19.4 million in 2015, an increase of nearly 20 times in just over 50 years. The number of U.S.-born Latinos rose from 5.5 million 1960 to 37.1 million in 2015 (Krogstad, 2017). According to Pew Research Center projections, Latinos will comprise 24% of the U.S. population (107 million individuals) by 2065. The implications of rapidly growing Latino populations in U.S. schools are of concern due to an already historic academic achievement gap between Latino students and their non-Hispanic counterparts. The rise in the Latino population does not equate to a similar rise in academic achievement.

20th-Century Immigration

In the early part of the 20th century, European immigrants followed different patterns than Latino immigrants. Some Europeans, like the Italians, Irish, and Polish, were not considered White when they entered the United States. Additionally, the Polish were Catholic rather than Protestant like the English before them. However, regardless of different experiences and religions, many immigrants shared a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) background. These early immigrants started work at the bottom of the economic hierarchy, and their children needed only to get through high school to get a good manufacturing job (Haller et al., 2011; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Portes et al., 2009, 2014). At the time, it would take the immigrant two or three generations to achieve middle-class status. With the postindustrialized economy came a shift toward a more knowledge- and skill-based job market versus a low-wage manufacturing, factory-based economy (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Immigrant children must, therefore, perform well in school within a single generational span as a condition for moving ahead (Haller et al., 2011; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Portes et al., 2009, 2014).

The Great Equalizer: Education

The concept of education as the great equalizer and the pathway to the American Dream becomes an unforgiving reality for Mexican-Americans. Education is a necessity for upward mobility to attain middle-class status and income. Among generations of Latino students, movement into the middle class does not always occur, contributing to a widening academic achievement gap (Fuligni, 1997; Nieto, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Taylor et al., 2009).

According to Fry and Lopez (2012), Latinos are much less likely to drop out of high school. High school dropouts are defined as students ages 16 to 24 years not enrolled in high

school but enrolled the year prior who lack a high school diploma. In 2011–2012, Latino dropouts numbered 134,000, representing an increase from 101,000 in 1999–2000. The number of high school dropouts rose in 2011–2012 due to more Latino students enrolled in school in October 2012 compared to October 2000 (Fry et al., 2013).

Scholars have debated whether Mexican-Americans are progressing or have stayed stagnant in attaining educational achievement by generational status (Duncan & Trejo, 2018; Haller et al., 2011; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). There are conflicting conclusions, however, about the educational attainment of Latinos across generations due to aggregate data suggesting various national origins, including Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans, among others (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). This study's focus is Mexican-Americans because they represent the largest and most rapidly increasing Latino population in the United States (Lopez & Velasco, 2011; Portes et al., 2009; Zsembik & Llanes, 1996). Understanding the success and challenges of Mexican-Americans and their successive generations is key in supporting their academic advancement and, thus, their economic social mobility.

Statement of Problem

Mexican immigrants and their successive generations are at risk of poor upward mobility due to a widening achievement gap. Immigrants frequently encounter adverse situations, including unauthorized entry, economic hardships such as poverty, and, at times, a completely different culture; as a result, attaining the American Dream is that much harder for successive generations (Haller et al., 2011; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997). Research suggests Mexican immigrants enter the country at the bottom of the economic hierarchy (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). If the next or second generation does not experience educational attainment, they are less likely to enter the labor market in a sector that will provide them upward mobility.

Latino immigration has altered the landscape of U.S. school-aged children (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Salgado, 2015; Terriquez, 2014; Vallejo, 2012). The number of Latino students has increased significantly, while White enrollment has declined (Orfield, 1997; Orfield et al., 2016; Orfield & Lee, 2005). Historically, immigrants have come to United States to fulfill the American Dream with the hope of attaining a good job and a good education. However, the Latino process of achieving U.S. citizenship oscillates between smooth acceptance and traumatic integration, depending on the characteristics of the immigrant experience, such as legal entry status, SES, one-parent family, the issues their children bring along, and the social context that receives them. To provide further context to such risks, it is vital to understand and learn about parents' influence by validating their stories and experiences. The voices of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers will offer a window into the future of their children, providing a critical understanding that leads to the academic and professional success of their children.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore, document, and analyze the experiences of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and the influence of those experiences on their third- and fourth-generation children's educational attainment at the elementary level. More specifically, the focus was on Mexican-American mothers' influence on their fourth-grade children who are members of the third and fourth generation. This Latino subgroup is distinctively at risk for lacking upward mobility after the second generation.

Latino immigrants and their children are a growing population able to shape the many facets of American society if given opportunities for an education. Members of these groups will provide nearly all the growth in the U.S. labor force over the next 40 years; accordingly, their

integration into U.S. society and their provision of human capital require continued attention from researchers and policymakers (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). First, more research is needed to obtain a better understanding of how third and subsequent generations of Latinos can begin to outperform earlier generations. Due to the barriers of poverty, segregation based on race/ethnicity and language, and many other risk factors, educators should be knowledgeable about Latinos' specific circumstances and locations within the U.S. educational system. Second, the national educational system needs to be aware of Latino immigrants and the successive generations of students who do not adapt to school uniformly. To catch up with their counterparts on the educational realm, Latino students need schools, communities, and society as a whole to understand their lived experiences with opportunities for educational and professional development, thus increasing their chances of upward mobility. Currently, with unequal opportunities, such as extreme societal, political, and cultural barriers, limiting equitable access to a high-caliber education, the United States fails to address the educational achievement gap of Latino youth whose minority status is quickly changing to that of the majority.

Research Questions

In the advocacy of supporting and understanding the influence of the Mexican-American family on future generations, the goal is to have an understanding of how to enhance educational outcomes. It is imperative to avoid stereotyping, categorizing, and encumbering families through the work and relationships developed with them. Instead, it is necessary to carefully construct and empower those relationships with an inclusive method using a strengths-based approach. For this reason, Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory was the conceptual framework used to "delineate promising lines of research on external influences that affect the capacity of families to foster the healthy development of their children" (p. 3). The research

questions support the key elements of Bronfenbrenner's systems thinking in regard to family functioning.

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, the ecological environment's perspective is "conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (p. 723). The research questions represented the systems of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, with each system explored further in Chapter II. Bronfenbrenner argued that the structures of external systems are nonlinear and directly affect and influence the family. Even more, the external environments influence the familial processes, creating multiple settings for human development with the family as the principal context of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The following research questions are rooted in this principle and understanding that the settings or systems are not independent of each other.

The three research questions were as follows:

1. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers define educational attainment?
2. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's educational attainment?
3. In what ways do gender, race, socioeconomic status, and familial immigration shape how second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's education?

Answering the questions deepened the understanding of the conditions and processes that shape human development. The questions showed how the lived experiences of the second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence the educational attainment of their third- and fourth-generation children's academic success.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory provided a theoretical perspective to understand families through a systematic method, focusing on the developing child and the interaction within the environment. The ecological environment is an approach to understanding families within the cultural and social context using five key elements of systems thinking: the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems. The ecological systems theory focuses on the developing child and the interaction that occurs amid complex environments from the innermost system of the child's function of the family to the outside environmental structures influencing human development.

Methods Overview

The study had a qualitative narrative approach framed by an inquiry methodological approach and conceptualized using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. A narrative inquiry approach is a way of studying people's experiences within the context of human relationships and processes.

Qualitative Approach

Czarniawska (2004) defined narrative research as a specific type of qualitative design in which "narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account for an event/action, chronologically connected" (p. 17). This qualitative narrative study used a purposeful sample of Mexican-American mothers of the second or third generation whose children were in fourth grade. The intent of the research was to understand the trajectory of educational attainment for third- and fourth-generation Mexican-American school-aged children. Creswell (2013) stressed the importance of individualism, asserting, "To level all individuals to a statistical mean

overlooks the uniqueness of individuals in our studies” (p. 48). In line with the uniqueness of individuals, the intent was to be sensitive to differences in gender, race, and socioeconomic issues. The purpose was to empower those individuals by listening to their stories, thereby adding to the scant research on the parental influence on the educational attainment of children of second- or third-generation Mexican-Americans.

Research Methodology

The researcher collected data through open-ended, semistructured interviews. Czarniawska (2004) suggested three ways to collect data for narratives: record spontaneous incidents of storytelling, solicit stories through interviews, and ask for stories through various mediums. Connelly and Clandinin (2007) suggested collecting conversations such as interviews and stories of families in addition to conducting open-ended, semistructured interviews.

This study took place in a border district in San Diego County and spanned November 2019 through February 2020. The participants were six Mexican-American mothers of the second- or third-generation. Phase 1 of the study included one-on-one interviews, analytic memos, translations, transcriptions, and data analysis. Phase 2 included specific questions based on the first interview, a follow-up one-on-one interview, analytic memos, translations, transcriptions, and data analysis. Because the intent and focus were the mothers’ influence on their child’s educational attainment, students did not participate in the study.

Definitions of Terms

Some of the key terms used in this study may not have commonly known meanings. The following definitions clarify these terms.

First generation: Latinos born outside the United States, its territories, or possessions who can be naturalized U.S. citizens, legal immigrants, or undocumented immigrants (Haller et al., 2011).

1.5 generation: Foreign-born individuals brought to the United States as children (Haller et al., 2011).

Second-generation: Native-born persons of foreign-born parents (Haller et al., 2011).

Third-generation plus: Native-born individuals with native-born parents who are grandchildren of immigrants (Haller et al., 2011).

Ecological systems theory: The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation throughout the life course between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This process is affected by the relationship between the settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

- *Microsystem:* The activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by the developing person (e.g., immediate family, school, daycare, playground).
- *Mesosystem:* A system of microsystems interrelated with two or more settings (e.g., family, work, social life).
- *Exosystem:* One or more settings that do not involve the developing person with events that occur within the systems (e.g., a young child's parent's place of work; the activities of the local school board).
- *Macrosystem:* Patterns that could exist in a culture as a whole and the belief systems of the society.

- *Chronosystem:* Changes over time not only within the person, but also in the environment and the relationship between the two processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Significance of the Study

The United States cannot afford to continue to jeopardize the future of Latino students, given their numbers, lack of economic status, and challenges in achieving an equitable education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Suro & Passel, 2003). It is essential to ensure Mexican-American children do not enter substandard schools, experience racism, or face systematic barriers to opportunities for socioeconomic growth. There is a serious, complex problem in the United States regarding the education of Latinos and their successive generations. It is common for practitioners and policymakers to have limited information on the generational status of Latino youth, with little knowledge of the Latino family and its context (Bean et al., 1997; Duong et al., 2016; Haller et al., 2011; Suro, 2003; Zsembik & Llanes, 1996). Of note is that each generation has unique attributes. Having contextual knowledge of the Latino family and its generational structures is critical to strengthening the generational connection and raising levels of educational attainment. Regardless of generational status, Latino youth are highly diverse in their levels of English proficiency, SES, parental education level, culture, and academic achievement. Although Latinos are making small strides, failing to validate their generational context inadequately informs theoretical or intervention models (Chapman & Perreira, 2005).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Mexican immigrants and their successive generations might lack upward economic movement due to a widening educational achievement gap. Scholars have debated whether years of education improved, worsened, or stagnated the mobility prospects for generations of Mexican-Americans (Duncan & Trejo, 2018; Haller et al., 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). Given that Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans comprise the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2011), the overall well-being of this population merits close attention. Mexican-American families who start at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy face many obstacles. Perlmann and Waldinger (1997) posited that the barriers of fewer resources, single-parent homes, and low school attainment hinder upward mobility. This unfortunate truth and ominous reality distinguishes today's generation from earlier generations.

A common assumption is that immigrants will strive to achieve educational and economic well-being for themselves, in turn facilitating success for future generations. This assumption does not hold true for Mexican and Mexican-American populations. Achieving social integration and economic mobility by successive generations depends on having access to a quality education from preschool to college (Tienda & Haskins, 2011). Multiple barriers, including immigration status and societal (e.g., segregation by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and language), impede the economic mobility for third- and fourth-generation Mexican-Americans.

A wealth of empirical research indicates the second generation outperforms the first and third generations, a phenomenon known as immigrant optimism (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Kao and Tienda (1995) perceived immigrant optimism as the difference in

explaining generational variations in academic performance among youth. Key in the explanation are the immigrant and native parents. Kao and Tienda claimed that children of immigrants (as opposed to the immigrant generation) will outperform their peers due to foreign-born youth's lack of English skills. Immigrant optimism usually stems from a dual-frame lens based on immigrant parents' desire to see their children attain high levels of academic achievement. Thus, members of the second-generation benefit from their parents' optimism and are more proficient in English (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Rivas-Drake & Mooney, 2009; Salgado, 2015). Regardless of immigrant status as newly arrived or native-born, adaptation experiences have economic consequences and are dependent on academic success, thus representing a circular relationship.

Academic success has economic impacts and is dependent on adaptation experiences. In turn, upward social mobility is highly dependent on educational attainment and academic success. Given that schooling is a significant factor for future occupational opportunities, this study will provide a deeper understanding of elements that influence Latino educational attainment over successive generations through the voices of second- and third-generation Mexican-American women with school-aged children.

The literature review incorporates past and current Latino immigration trends and experiences. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory receives discussion and analysis as a conceptual framework for exploring second- and third-generation mothers' influence on their child's educational attainment. Addressing external factors such as poverty, race/ethnicity, and language is imperative when discussing the Mexican-American mother's influence over her child's educational attainment.

Latino Population and Immigration Experience

Historical Context

Of the Mexican-American population, Telles and Ortiz stated, “As a wide variety of scholars…have noted, no other ethnic group in the United States has had the same relation with its origin country” (p. 10). Due to manifest destiny and ideas of race, the United States appropriated nearly half of Mexico’s territory in 1848, after the Mexican-American War. The consequences of this conquest have shaped the relationship between the two countries, laying the groundwork for the social and economic positions of Mexicans and their successive generations in the United States (Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

With a shared 2,000-mile land border between the two countries, immigration to the United States from Mexico has a stark history. This historical sentiment continues, exemplified by the current national dialogue and hostile attitude toward immigration. In 2020, it is important to delineate between past and recent major waves of immigration to the United States. The first wave spiked in 1910 on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, with over 13.5 million foreign-born immigrants entering the country. Mexican immigration surged between the 1910s and 1920s, as people fled during the Mexican Revolution. During the 1930s, immigration plateaued at 14.2 million individuals, falling to just 9.6 million in 1970 (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014) before rising again. According to the Pew Research Center, more than 16 million Mexicans immigrated from 1965 to 2015, making this the largest mass migration in U.S. history. Between 2009 and 2014, 870,000 Mexican came to the United States, down from the 2.9 million entrants between 1995 and 2000 (Krogstad, 2016).

During the middle of the 20th century, the U.S. Latino population was predominantly third generation and beyond (Suro & Passel, 2003). As with other underrepresented groups,

Latinos have faced a history of societal discrimination and disenfranchisement. These experiences created cultural and political shifts, leading to the Latino Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s, providing opportunities for Latinos to exercise new leadership roles during a period of American prosperity (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Suro & Passel, 2003). The mid-20th century was a significant time in the United States, as Latinos and African Americans alike reacted to injustices of the low-wage labor market and their place as foot soldiers not afforded the possibilities for a brighter economic future (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Although Mexican-Americans had fought and died in World War II, they did not benefit from integrating into the American melting pot, as other European ethnic minorities had done (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Despite their sacrifices, upon their return from war, Mexican-American veterans found themselves living in *barrios*, victims of discrimination and prejudice.

Recent Developments and Trends

With more than 53 million members representing 17.1% of the U.S. population, Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States (Lopez & Rohal, 2017). Latinos are a diverse population. The Mexican-origin group is by far the largest at 34.6 million, or 64.1% of all U.S. Latinos (Lopez & Rohal, 2017). Between 1970 and 2011, the percentage of school-age children who were first- or second-generation Latino more than quadrupled (Duong et al., 2016). In the United States, the Latino population grew exponentially, with the proportion of Latino students soaring from 5% in 1970 to 25.3% in 2011 (Orfield et al., 2016).

By 1980, the first and third generations were almost equal in size; in 1990, new immigrants became the largest segment of the Latino population. In the 1990s, immigration and high fertility rates for the Hispanic populace created a population boom (Krogstad, 2016). This era of recent immigration boosted Latino immigrants' employment prospects in the United

States, particularly throughout the Southeast and Midwest. Mexican populations rose in regions not seen before. Although Latinos have spread throughout the nation, more than half of all Mexicans (51%) reside in the West (Lopez, 2015). Mexicans and Mexican-Americans make up 35% of California's population, and an additional 35% of the nation's Mexicans live in Texas.

Recent trends in Mexican and Mexican-American population growth merit closer examination. Between 2000 and 2007, the United States saw a steady influx of immigrants, with no significant decline until the Great Recession (December 2007 to June 2009; Krogstad, 2017). During that period, the struggling American economy nearly halted unauthorized Mexican migration (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). By 2050, projections show Latino children of the second-, third -, and successive generations to have an even greater presence, with their economic status primarily determined by the success or failure of the U.S. educational system in meeting the needs of these children and their families.

Latino Educational Attainment

In regard to the Latino population, Portes (2014) posited, "The rapid growth…represents one of the most important demographic and social phenomena confronting these societies" (p. 47). This observation is salient because Mexican immigrants and their successive generations are distinctively at risk of lacking upward mobility due to a widening achievement gap compared to their White counterparts (Coley & Baker, 2013). This achievement gap, also known as the opportunity gap, is attributable to many factors, including poverty, race/ethnicity, and language. As a result, scholars debate whether Mexican-American youth have improved their educational growth or if it has stagnated across generations (Alba et al., 2011; Duncan & Trejo, 2011; Haller et al., 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014).

Mexican immigrant parents come from a country where expectations of a formal education are much lower than prospects in the United States (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). In Mexico, students can end their formal education with the equivalent of an eighth-grade U.S. education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Not finishing high school in Mexico does not carry the same stigma as it does in the United States. Upward mobility in the United States means attaining academic success by graduating from college and entering a profession. Without a college education, economic consequences can be significant.

There is a slight increase in Latino college-level educational attainment. For example, over the past 4 decades, the number of Latinos achieving an associate's or bachelor's degree has increased. In 2010, the number of degrees conferred by race/ethnicity was 8.5% Hispanic, up from 8.1% in 2009; however, Hispanics continue to trail other groups. In 2010, of the 1.7 million bachelor's degrees awarded, 71% were to non-Hispanic Whites, 10% were to Blacks, and 7% were to Asians (Fry & Taylor, 2012). Despite a slight upward trend for Hispanics, there is still a dramatic achievement gap for this growing population.

Demographic Trends

Latinos are the fastest-growing population in the United States (Lopez et al., 2018). The youngest generation of Latinos—those under 18 years of age—grew by 22% from 2006 to 2016. In 2016, Latinos accounted for 25% of the 54 million U.S. K-12 students based on data from 14 states, an increase from the six states with Latino students in 2000. In 2016, eight states saw a rise of Latino students in their K-12 educational system: Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington. Latino students account for approximately half of the K-12 students in New Mexico (61%), California (52%), and Texas (49%;) (Lopez et al., 2018).

The demographic shifts indicate a strong need for adaptation by school systems to support the educational attainment of Latino youth. The states experiencing a recent influx of Latino students may not be fully prepared to meet the educational needs of a diverse student population. Therefore, it is essential to examine Latino educational performance in mathematics and reading to understand the achievement gap between Latino and White students.

Data Trends Using National Assessment of Educational Progress

In evaluating second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers' influence, it is necessary to distill the past and current academic performance of fourth-graders in mathematics and reading. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) measures student performance in reading and math at Grades 4, 8, and 12 in private and public schools across the nation. NAEP reading scores have a range scale from 0 to 500 for all grade levels. The NAEP mathematics assessments began on a national level in 1990, followed by reading in 1992.

For this study, student results will focus on Grade 4 NAEP math and reading scores. The student demographics discussed are race/ethnicity, language proficiency (English language learners [ELLs] and non-English language learners [non-ELLs]), and economic level using the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). In 2015, the percent of ELLs—students who speak a language other than English—in public schools was 9.5%, or 4.8 million students (McFarland et al., 2018). In 2000, the percentage was 8.1%, or 3.8 million students. The number of ELLs in the United States continues to grow; however, their lower levels of academic performance do not. Much of poor performance begins in elementary school, limiting educational opportunities and hindering possibilities of future economic prosperity (Hill & Torres, 2010). The disparities in achievement between ELLs and non-ELLs are significant. Another measure of SES is the NSLP, which qualifies children for reduced-price or free school meals based on household and family

size. The NAEP (2017) identifies NSLP as a student group because it considers participation in the lunch program as a measure of SES.

The Grade 4 proficient-level scale scores in mathematics and reading are 249 and 238, respectively. The achievement levels represent national expectations of student performance in relation to the new national framework. Awareness of students' achievement levels indicates the need for greater opportunities to achieve success for Hispanics and Mexican-American students. See Table 1 and a further discussion on mathematics performance in NAEP.

Table 3 *NAEP Mathematics Performance for Grade 4 in 2013, 2015, and 2017 by Student Groups*

Student groups	2013	2015	2017
White	250	248	248
Hispanic	231	230	229
Black	224	224	223
ELLs	219	218	217
Non-ELLs	244	243	243
NAEP math proficiency scale score	249	249	249

Mathematics Performance in NAEP

Disaggregating mathematics data in terms of race/ethnicity, NAEP (2017) reported the national average scale score for Grade 4: 248 for White students compared to 229 for Hispanic students. This number represents an average 19-point achievement gap in the last 3 recorded years: 2013, 2015, and 2017. On average, Blacks showed no difference in the last 3 years of collected data, with a scale score of 224, six points lower than Hispanic/Latinos in mathematics. Hispanics scored an average of 20 points below the proficiency rate in mathematics over the last 3 recorded years.

English Language Learner Performance in Mathematics in NAEP

ELLs are students who speak a language other than English. The Mathematics NAEP (2017) shows the largest academic gap between ELLs and non-ELLs in Grade 4 (see Table 1). ELLs had a scale score of 219 in 2013, 218 in 2015, and 217 in 2017; non-ELLs had an average scale score of 244 in 2013, and 243 in both 2015 and 2017. The difference between ELLs and non-ELLs was 25 points, which was larger than any other gap, even between ethnic groups.

Reading Performance in NAEP

The NAEP (2017) report on reading performance in Grade 4 showed similar disparities as in mathematics scale scores. The national average scale score for White students in Grade 4 was static at 232 in 2013, 2015, and 2017. Hispanics students displayed a slight incline with the movement of one scale score each recorded year: 207, 208, and 209. Despite the small growth, gap between White and Hispanic students is a 29-point scale score gap, indicating that Hispanic students in Grade 4 are lagging well behind their White peers. Black students, on average, had no difference in the last 3 years of collected data (2013, 2015, and 2017), with a scale score of 206. Although the gap between Hispanics and Blacks is small, neither group has achieved the expected proficiency scale score of 238 in reading; thus, special attention to this achievement gap is crucial.

ELL Performance in Reading in NAEP

According to the Pew Research Center (Bialik et al., 2018), Spanish was the most common home language for ELLs in 45 states, including Washington, DC. Bialik et al. (2018) identified Latinos' poor performance in reading as detrimental to the state of a nation with a growing Hispanic/Latino population. The lowest performance scale scores are evident for ELLs, whose stagnated reading achievement reflects the lack of language ability to access the core

curriculum and become proficient readers. Even more glaring is the 49-point achievement gap of ELLs in 2017 to reach a scale score of proficiency.

Table 4 *NAEP Reading Performance for Grade 4 in 2013, 2015, and 2017 by Student Groups*

Student groups	2013	2015	2017
White	232	232	232
Hispanic	207	208	209
Black	206	206	206
ELLs	187	187	189
Non-ELLs	226	226	226
NSLP	207	209	208
Non-NSLP	236	237	236
NAEP reading proficiency scale score	238	238	238

Reading Performance by National School Lunch Program

The NAEP (2017) deems NSLP a student group, using participation in the lunch program as a measure of SES and the need for federal aid. In 2016, the Hispanic/Latino poverty rate was 21.4%, a slight decline from 2014 at 23.6% (Krogstad & Flores, 2016). The non-NSLP group comprises students who do not require federal aid and whose household family incomes are at or above the required thresholds. Trends in Grade 4 NAEP reading scores for NSLP indicate stagnation for scale scores in 2013, 2015, and 2017. Students who are in poverty are performing well below the reading proficiency scale score of 238, with a 30-point difference between NSLP and non-NSLP.

Generational Educational Attainment

Researchers examining educational and economic attainment of successive generations of immigrants have produced varied outcomes, subsequently proposing a wide range of factors that influence those outcomes. In a meta-analysis, Duong et al. (2016) found an advantage that favors

second- over third-or-later-generation immigrant students in low-SES samples. Similarly, Hispanics on the NAEP in reading and math showed clear inequities when isolated for SES. The differences in the educational outcomes of generational youth vary by SES. However, Kroneberg (2008) noted the reverse to be true in middle- and high-SES samples where second-generation immigrants were performing less well than their third-or-later-generation counterparts.

Numerous factors, such as the family and environmental issues, are at play in supporting the Mexican-American. For example, the educational aspirations of the community in which students live are linked to their achievement (Kroneberg, 2008). When comparing the environmental factors and educational aspirations, the most significant difference between high- and low-SES schools is the effect of parental status (i.e., the socioeconomic position). The parental influence is much stronger in low-SES schools, as noted by Duong et al. (2016) and others. Research suggests that when outside factors are not favorable—such as deviant behaviors linked to dropping out of school, joining gangs, or stagnating in low-paid, menial jobs—the family background is critical in determining the divergent path (Bankston & Zhou, 2002; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Portes et al., 2009). Additionally, parents taking an active role in their children's educational attainment creates favorable conditions for adaptation to the school environment and is closely linked to remaining in school. In turn, school achievement is one of the best predictors of future economic success (Schmid, 2001). The educational achievement and progress of today's Latino are related to the varied human and financial capital their parents bring with them (Feliciano, 2006; Haller et al., 2011; Ryabov & Van Hook, 2007; Schmid, 2016).

Parental Educational Attainment and Immigrant Status

Kao (2004) referenced previous research by Kao and Tienda (1995), finding that both foreign-born and native-born children of immigrants were more effective in achieving academic

success than were native-born children of native-born parents. Parental immigration status mattered more than the child's immigration status and accounted for the students' superior academic performance. This distinction is important because it is not the parents' educational attainment that supports the educational achievement of their Latino children. Latino parental educational attainment levels are low among immigrant and native-born parents. For example, 82.3% of impoverished Latino children have immigrant parents with a high school education or less (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Similarly, 73.1% of impoverished native-born parents of the third generation or beyond have only a high school education or less (Lopez & Velasco, 2011).

Labor Force

By 2022, almost one fourth of the U.S. labor force growth will be children of Latino immigrants (Suro & Passel, 2003). The non-Latino labor force was projected to increase by 9% by 2020, with a 77% growth in the Latino labor force compared to 12% in 2020 (Suro & Passel, 2003). This growth will have a negative impact on the Latino population due to educational challenges and inequities complicating their entry into the global workforce. These immense concerns inherently decrease socioeconomic mobility due to inaccessibility to educational attainment and deepened language barriers. In 2020, 70% of the Mexican-American second-generation persons live in families where the head of household does not have a college degree (Suro & Passel, 2003). The Mexican immigrant subgroup enters the job market at entry level, and upward movement for their successive generations is difficult due to adverse situations accompanying economic change (Haller et al., 2011; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997). The inability to move up economically leads to triple segregated barriers facing the Latino community.

Triple Segregation Influencing Latino Educational Attainment

As the nation has become more diverse, Latinos are increasingly separated by where they live and go to school. Segregation is rife in many communities throughout the United States, deepening and spreading racial and socioeconomic inequities in U.S. schools. America is more segregated now than in the years before the 1964 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision (Gándara & Aldana, 2014). Orfield et al. (2016) of the Civil Rights Project discussed the striking rise in what they call the school system's "double segregation of Blacks and Hispanics by race and poverty" (p. 1). The authors drew upon the increasing body of research and evidence to expound on the growing national population trend transforming the racial compositions in schools and how these changes impact segregated schools. Orfield et al. asserted,

> (1) segregation creates unequal opportunities and helps perpetuate stratification in the society and (2) diverse schools have significant advantages not only for learning and attainment but for the creation of better preparation for all groups to live and work successfully in a complex society which will have no racial majority. (p. 1)

There is a strong correlation between racial and economic segregation related to inferior educational opportunities for Latinos, and, more specifically, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans (Gándara, 2010; Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Orfield et al., 2016; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Vallejo, 2012). These barriers hinder upward mobility within the first or second generation, making academic attainment difficult. According to survey results from Taylor et al. (2009), 74% of Latinos who have a high school diploma or less and who are not continuing their education claimed they needed to help support their family, 49% mentioned their English was limited, and 40% said they could not afford to go to school. The demands of a global society will require more than a high school education for Latino immigrants to compete and overcome socioeconomic barriers. Following is further discussion on the concept of segregation by race,

poverty, and language. The *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and its aspirations during the Civil Rights era appears to have been moving backward on the issues, trajectory, and experiences of the Mexican-American (Orfield et al., 2016).

Segregation by Race/Ethnicity Influencing Educational Attainment

The unequal opportunities for students segregated by race generate educational challenges and inequities, thereby providing inferior opportunities. The number of extremely segregated non-White schools (with 0–10% White students), also known as hypersegregated schools, has tripled since 1991, rising from 5.7% to 18.6% of public schools (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). The racial composition of U.S. student enrollment was 79.1% White in 1970 and 50% White in 2013. Due to the student racial composition in a nation declining in White enrollment, there has been a sharp decline in schools with predominantly White students. For example, the percentage of schools where White registration consisted of 90% to 100% of the student population dropped from 39.9% in 1988 to 18.6% in 2013. Although this trend had the positive impact of integrating Whites with a more diversified community, the downfall is that Blacks and Latinos are intensely isolated in those schools. Gándara (2010) discussed the concept of triple segregation, meaning segregation for Latinos in the three areas of poverty, race/ethnicity, and language. Gándara focused on the implications of barriers such as hypersegregated schools (with 0–10% White students), which are closely tied to low educational performance. This is an important note because, for Latinos, "The resources necessary for developing culturally inclusive policies and programs seem out of grasp for the often-impoverished schools that Latino children attend" (Hill & Torres, 2010, p. 106). Hearing all voices remains elusive, especially for Latino families who are uncomfortable communicating in English or are unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system.

When youth are socialized in schools in which few students have benefited from the advantages and power of middle-class families, they are poorly prepared for a society in which colleges/universities and good jobs are strongly White and middle-class institutions (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Orfield et al., 2016; Portes et al., 2011). Segregated schools are generally those that serve poor children with staff who are ill-equipped to do so. Also, Latino children who attend racial/ethnic minority schools and live in poverty may find barriers to school attainment based on limited social capital and instructional resources (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Ryabov & Van Hook, 2007). More specifically, racialization and the lack of mobility related to poor-quality schools reinforce Mexican-Americans' low status in U.S. society (Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

Haller et al. (2011), references Mexican-Americans pursuing the American Dream throughout generations reinforcing the significance of diversity within groups of people threaded into the American fabric are to be recognized today versus anticipating assimilation or racialization exclusions. Similarly, Alba (2006) recognized the Mexican-American population as highly diverse in terms of SES, racial appearance, linguistic assimilation, and legal status. Only a fraction of Mexican-Americans is pursuing the American Dream as, due to the humble beginnings of the Mexican immigrant generation, a significant portion cannot achieve social mobility due to racial discrimination, lack of educational opportunities, and the absence of socioeconomic opportunities. Furthermore, when controlling for SES, regardless of gender, consistent adverse outcomes directly relate to Latinos more than any other group; thus, racism surfaces as a negative factor either directly or indirectly on the Latino immigrant youth (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

Segregation by Poverty Influencing Educational Attainment

Because education is key to upward mobility, the academic attainment of second and successive generations of Latino children is of utmost importance. Without education, downward mobility is likely, with a continuation of poverty in succeeding generations. Although not all Latinos live in poverty, there is still an array of barriers for Latino youth, no matter their SES (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). For example, in 2005, less than 28% of Latino families lived in homes where income levels were $60,000 or higher and considered middle-class income for a family of five (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Poverty is on the rise with a shrinking middle class and an increase in poverty rates among Mexican-Americans, from 29.8% in 2007 to 37.3% in 2010 (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

The U.S. Census Bureau measures poverty based on family size and income (McFarland et al., 2018). The official poverty line for a family of four was $22,113; if a family's income falls below that amount, then every person in that family is impoverished. According to the Hispanic Pew Research Center, Latinos reached a record-high poverty rate in 1994 at 41.5% versus 35% in 2010 (Taylor et al., 2009). In addition, poverty rates for poor immigrant children of Mexican origin under the age of 18 years increased from 68.6% in 1994 to 75.1% in 2010 (Taylor et al., 2009). Further complicating the challenges, over one third of Latino children (35%) suffer food insecurity (Gándara, 2015). In 2010**,** 6.1 million Latino children were living in poverty, and two thirds, or 4.1 million, were children of immigrants, more than any other racial or ethnic group (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Of the 4.1 million Latino children of immigrants in poverty, 86.2% were born in the United States (Passel et al., 2011).

The rapidly growing Latino population faces added challenges as a result of poverty. Young Latino youths are at a higher risk by gender, where early childbearing commonly

correlates with school dropout (Leadbeater, 1996). In 2010, 45.4%—nearly half of poor Latino children—lived in families headed by a single mother. This trend is not likely to change, given that more than half (53%) of all births to Latinas in 2013 were to unmarried women (Gándara, 2015). In 2007, 29% of immigrant female Latinas ages 16 to 25 years were mothers compared to 17% of native-born female Latinas. Among Latino boys living in poverty, family monetary needs could drive them into the workforce earlier than their non-Latino counterparts, again interfering with school performance (Chapman & Perreira, 2005). The increase in poverty of U.S.-born Latino children demands attention, as it has detrimental implications on the educational attainment and upward social mobility for Mexican-Americans and their future generations.

Segregation by Language Influencing Educational Attainment

The barriers facing Latinos in achieving educational success include not only poverty and race/ethnicity, but language segregation, as well. Historically in the United States, the expectation is for immigrants to learn English as rapidly as possible and discontinue the use of their native language; this practice is unlike many other countries, with multiple languages valued and taught in schools (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Being a Spanish-speaking ELL puts immigrants at a disadvantage, leading to a pattern of lower standardized test scores for first-generation students (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Due to limited English proficiency, it takes students longer to read, which, in turn, contributes to slower test-taking. Although ELLs may be able to compensate for this weakness in the classroom environment (e.g., by spending more time on homework or seeking help from teachers or peers), it can be more difficult to offset this limitation in time-restricted testing situations (Duong et al., 2016). What further complicates the issues is that ELLs are not limited to first-generation students; rather, the majority of ELLs are born inside the United States. American-born students comprise 76% of ELLs in elementary

school and 56% of ELLs in middle and high school (Duong et al., 2016). Immigrants and their children shape many aspects of American society and will provide virtually all the growth in the U.S. labor force by 2050 (Taylor et al., 2011). Latino immigrants and their successive generations face challenges due to segregation by poverty, race/ethnicity, and language when attempting to acculturate into American society, which affects their educational outcomes.

To explain the achievement gaps Latinos experience, researchers have examined the human capital brought from the home countries. Human capital is the formal education and occupational skills immigrants bring with them to the host country (Portes et al., 2009). Human capital supports the understanding of first-generation immigrants and the impact on the educational attainment of second and successive generations.

There is an urgency in focusing research on the family environment of Mexican-Americans, the largest Latino subgroup in the country. This study was a way to humanize and understand the educational trajectory of the Mexican-American family by generational status, with a unique lens on the mother's influence on her child's educational attainment. The mother's impact on her children's future economic opportunity to mobilize into the middle-class rests on the youth's academic success and trajectory. Understanding the complexities, roles, and interactions dictated by generational status offers insight into the educational attainment of the developing third- or fourth-generation child.

Segmented Assimilation

The educational attainment of successive generations of Latinos assimilated to U.S. society is a critical concept. Assimilation, by definition, is the process by which immigrants and their children integrate into society (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009). Assimilation has implications on Mexican-Americans and their educational attainment. The varying outcomes of subgroups in the

U.S. educational system have led researchers to propose different theoretical perspectives emphasizing the diverse impact of assimilation (Alba et al., 2011; Crosnoe & López Turley, 2011; Gordon, 1964). It was important to highlight these perspectives in this study.

Theorists claim immigrant children no longer move successfully through the school system and up the socioeconomic ladder (Duong et al., 2016; Haller et al., 2011; Kao & Tienda, 1995). Educational outcomes vary widely and are thus often unpredictable; as such, it is difficult to determine favorable or unfavorable conditions for the growing successive Mexican-American generations. According to the straight-line assimilation model, with each succeeding generation, the groups become more similar to mainstream Americans and more economically successful in a sequential, linear process (Waters, 1994; Zsembik & Llanes, 1996). The expectation with straight-line assimilation is to show greater similarity to the majority group than the immigrant group. As opposed to assimilation, acculturation occurs over time and involves individuals adapting their beliefs, values, and what they do on a daily basis through interactions with new cultural groups (Berry, 1990). Assimilation depicts intergenerational social and economic mobility as proceeding inevitably from acculturation to full integration into the economic, political, and social institutions of U.S. society. Many researchers believe assimilation happens regardless of national origin or parental characteristics (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

Whereas Alba and Nee (2003) acknowledged assimilation takes place within racially and economically heterogeneous contexts, Brown and Bean (2006) contended that trying to define assimilation too broadly makes the concept lose meaning. Crosnoe and López Turley (2011) noted that today's predominately non-European immigrants must struggle even harder than past European immigrants to provide the economic foundation their children need to pursue higher education, which becomes increasingly important to their children's future. To conceptualize the

nature of generational differences of Latinos and the impact on educational attainment, the segmented assimilation theory indicates enormous disparities in human capital (formal education and occupational skills), translating into patterned differences for second-generation Latino youth and their offspring, along with a third and powerful factor of the family structure (Haller et al., 2011). The patterned differences in segmented assimilation focus on negative influences such as gangs, violence, drugs, imprisonment, and teenage pregnancy. Because segmented assimilation is a deficit model, this research adopted an asset-based stance centered on the family structures and context. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological framework facilitates comprehending and appreciating the cultural, social, and complex systems that Mexican-American second- and third-generation mothers' experience, thus contributing to the current literature.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory provides a theoretical perspective, delineating a systematic method focusing on the developing person within the context of the environment and the interaction between the two. Ecological systems theory has evolved since 1979 in three phases. First, between 1977 and 1979, the theory was specific to the person-context (systems) interrelatedness. During the 1980s (Rosa & Tudge, 2013), the theory included the processes of human development and the connection between culture and class. In the third phase, beginning in 1994, Bronfenbrenner identified proximal processes as key factors creating a different model, changing the name of the theory to the bioecological system theory. This study used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory from 1989 because class and culture became a connection along with the addition of the chronosystem, which is with the evolution of time during the lifespan of the individual.

Bronfenbrenner (1989) explained, “The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). The ecological environment to which Bronfenbrenner referred was an approach to understanding families within the cultural and social context. Bronfenbrenner (1986) claimed that research on external influences affects the capacity of families to foster the healthy development of their children. The focus is the world in which the child lives, given that human development occurs amid complex environments. Bronfenbrenner (1989) posited five key elements, or systems thinking, specific to the function of the family, moving from the innermost level to the outermost structures. Specifically, the five elements are the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems of the ecological systems theory, described in detail in the following sections.

Microsystem

The microsystem is composed of the innermost level and the immediate setting directly affecting the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Examples of the microsystem are the family, home, school, classroom, and any direct influence in the parent’s life. The microsystem is a single setting interacting with the developing person. Bronfenbrenner (1994) explained,

> A microsystem is a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment. (p. 5)

Mesosystem

The mesosystem has direct contact with the first level, or microsystem. The mesosystem requires looking beyond the immediate setting. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), “A setting is defined as a place with particular physical features in which the participants engage in particular activities in particular roles” (p. 514). The roles can be sons and daughters, parents,

teachers, and employees, among others. The microsystem emphasizes the term *activity versus behavior* to identify essential features. The activity allows insight into identifying the interaction between subjects.

The mesosystem also requires looking beyond a single setting. For example, a child's ability to learn to read in the primary grades depends on the instruction received from the teacher and the connection between home and school. The power in the mesosystem is that it helps to connect two or more of the systems where the child, parent, and family live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The family is the principal context in which human development occurs; however, it is one of several settings. Moreover, the settings are interdependent (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), the mesosystem is "the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school and neighborhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)" (p. 25). Thus, the mesosystem is a system of microsystems. An example of the interaction between two microsystems is the communication between the parent and the school. A parent who does not speak the English language creates a strain between parent and teacher.

Exosystem

The third system in ecological systems theory, the exosystem "refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 25). Accordingly, the developing person is profoundly affected by the events occurring in settings where the person is not even present. Swick and Williams (2006) further defined the concept, stating, "Exosystems are the contexts we experience vicariously and yet they have a direct impact on us" (p.372). An example would be

parents who, after dropping their child at daycare, are physically at work but mentally thinking about their child (Swick & Williams, 2006). Exosystems can be empowering or degrading, depending on the family's stress within the scope of the system. For example, although a child may never physically enter the parents' workplace and has limited access to the parents' social network or circle of friends, the family may still feel excessive stress.

Macrosystem

Extending from the systems with clear interconnections to the psychological development affecting a child is the external environment, called the macrosystem. This fourth system is composed of a larger network of cultural beliefs, societal values, political trends, and "community happenings" (Swick & Williams, 2006, p. 372). Macrosystems influence what, how, when, and where individuals carry out relations (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). For example, the macrosystem surrounds people, holding their lives together with many threads. For instance, the Woman, Infants, and Children program may positively impact a new young mother by providing nutritional supplements, vitamins, and educational resources that, in turn, impact her newborn child. Through such public policy, the young mother is empowered to be more effective and caring toward her newborn (Swick & Williams, 2006).

Chronosystem

The chronosystem frames the changing aspects of families in the historical context as they occur within the various systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). The chronosystem is the reason for choosing this phase of the theory. For example, traditionally, in developmental science, the passage of time is equal to the chronological age.

Figure 1 presents the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), showing that all systems influence, guide, and impact the function of the family. The development in context is

the function of the family, which is dynamic and interactive, thus fostering a framework that sustains the family contexts between parents and their children. Using the ecological systems theory of human development helps to explain the unique ecological experiences of Mexican-American mothers, particularly of the second and third generations. Highlighting Bronfenbrenner's definition reinforces the need to deepen the understanding of Mexican-Americans and their future generations. Bronfenbrenner stated,

> The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, *throughout the life course*, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 188)

Understanding the distinctive experiences between these different settings and the larger contexts embedded within creates a framework to explore the developmental outcomes of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and their influence over their child's development. Insight into daily activities such as where they live, how they teach and nurture their children, and the focus of their influence over their child's educational attainment is crucial to the outcomes of development because "the developmental outcomes of today shape the developmental outcomes of tomorrow" (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 191).

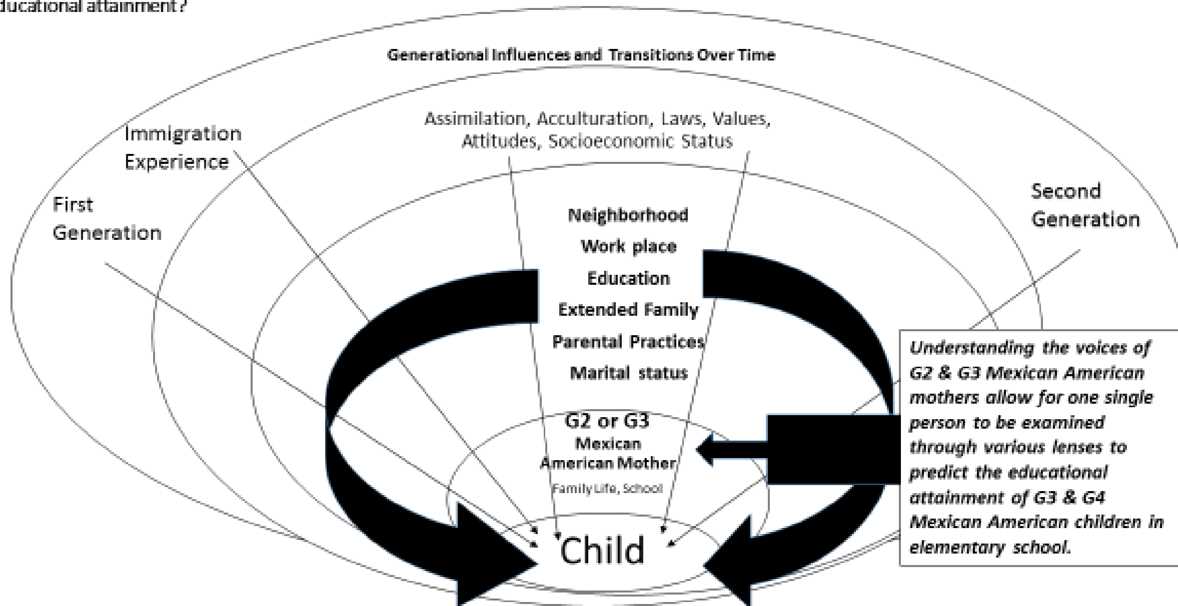

Figure 2 Conceptual Framework Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework

Note. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological framework explains Mexican-American second- and third-generation mothers' influences on their child's educational experience

Summary

The premise of education as the great equalizer is more myth than reality (Coley & Baker, 2013), especially for poor and marginalized Latinos. In the United States, external sociocultural, political, and economic factors significantly influence the Mexican-American and stem from sources bigger than the U.S. educational system. Furthermore, these factors have created a legacy of inequitable opportunities, generating patterns of economic disparities, racial inequalities, and linguistic barriers that augment the achievement gap. Understanding the educational attainment of the growing second, third, and fourth generation of Mexican-Americans through the ecological systems framework to dichotomize and humanize their experiences and stories informs practice, policy, and theory. The ultimate goal of economic mobility for the third generation and beyond is creating an equitable society on an educational

stage, not only within the United States but on a global scale, as well. Despite efforts to provide educational equities for Latino immigrants, assimilation remains a cautionary tale and positive outcomes are not guaranteed (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The growing minority Mexican-American population necessitates information, understanding, and action.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

> Lumping together first generation, second generation, third and fourth generations in one single category is considered a major methodological flaw. (Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 9)

A Review of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore, document, and analyze the experiences of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and the influence of those experiences on their third- and fourth-generation children's educational attainment at the elementary level. The mother's impact on her children's future economic opportunity to mobilize into the middle class rests on the student's academic success. This study adds to the research by describing Mexican-American mothers' influence on their child's educational attainment at the elementary school level. Focusing on second- and third-generation mothers provided a better understanding of the academic achievement of a growing majority delineated by generational status in the United States.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study.

1. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers define educational attainment?
2. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's educational attainment?
3. In what ways do gender, race, socioeconomic status, and familial immigration shape how second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's education?

Answering the research questions advanced understanding of the conditions and processes that shape human development from the mother's perspective. Knowing how the mother describes and explains her life's experiences and raises her children adds to the current body of research. As a result, these questions exposed how the lived experiences of the second- and third-generation mothers influence the educational attainment of Mexican-American third- and fourth-generation children.

Qualitative Research and Methodology

The qualitative narrative methodological study had, at its foundation, an activist approach rooted in social justice and the human experience. The purpose was to investigate how second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their child's educational attainment. By focusing on the generational status, participants' collective voices presented a reflective, layered understanding of Mexican-American communities. A narrative study enables an exploration of how people experience the world and, equally importantly, how humans, whether individually or socially, are storytelling organisms (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The second- and third-generation mothers' storytelling provided a deeper understanding of the educational attainment of third- and fourth-generation Mexican-Americans. These lived experiences offered a lens to address educational inequities for the growing Mexican-American third and fourth generations.

Research Design

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the study of humans' lived experiences, honoring their stories and recognizing them as a source of knowledge and experience (Clandinin, 2016). Similarly, Creswell (2013) defined narrative research as a collection of stories from individuals

documenting their experiences through accounts co-constructed between the researcher and the participant. Using narrative inquiry, a researcher explores the life of one or more individuals, developing a narrative, or “re-storying” stories, and identifying themes (Creswell, 2013; Creswell et al., 2007). Narrative inquiry sheds light on identities narrated by lived experiences. Creswell argued for the importance of qualitative narrative inquiry, asserting, “To level all individuals to a statistical mean overlooks the uniqueness of individuals in our studies” (p. 48).

Qualitative narrative inquiry entails collecting stories from individuals expressed as lived experiences, including their past, present, and future, conveying temporal or permanent change (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, 2007). The uncovered narratives add to the scant research of parental influence on the educational attainment of elementary school children of third and fourth Mexican-Americans generations. Using narrative inquiry on family environmental factors for the members of the successive immigrant generations provided insight on how to meet the current and future demands of Mexican-American students within the context of their third- or fourth-generational differences. A detailed understanding of Mexican-American generational differences specific to children’s educational attainment was possible through this qualitative, narrative inquiry study, as conveyed by the lived experiences of second- and third-generation mothers.

Recruitment

The population of interest was second- or third-generation Mexican-American mothers whose children attended a Title I U.S. elementary school. Recruitment took place through known professionals in education who work in the border region of southern California. The researcher sought and received approval through the public school district’s institutional review board (IRB) office as well as the University of California San Diego IRB. Participants took part in interviews

in locations of their choice, primarily school sites or the local public library. District approval was critical for transparency purposes in a single public school district, located along the southern border in San Diego County.

Participants

The researcher utilized a purposeful, specific demographic sampling technique based on race/ethnicity, gender, generational status, and SES. The first criterion was participants who identified themselves as second- or third-generation Mexican-American. The second requirement was gender, as only female parents were eligible for this study. SES identification was as determined by student participation in the FRLP as described by California state standards. Participants were from Title I schools (schools where more than 90% of families qualify for the FRLP) in the border region of the southern portion of San Diego County. I met with a parent/school liaison who worked at both Title I schools, providing her the criteria for the study. The parent liaison is responsible for supporting parents and connecting them with resources within the community, as well as training on the social-emotional and behavioral well-being of their children. I also gained access to parents by speaking to other principals from the surrounding border district. No students were eligible for the study and all participants were above 18 years of age. Six participants meeting the aforementioned criteria participated in the study.

Interviews

Interviews are common means of data collection in qualitative research, allowing for an exchange of information between the participant and the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Creswell et al., 2007). Emerson et al. (1995) described interviews as allowing willing and able participants to describe their social life, with these individuals serving as valuable tools or, at times, the only

access. The semistructured interviews comprised open-ended questions specific to the topic to elicit the central themes of the participants' life experiences (see Appendix).

First Interview

One-on-one interviews with second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers followed a semistructured framework, beginning with a set of predetermined questions followed by probes and follow-up queries emerging from the dialogue. Participants engaged in a 1- to 1.5-hour interview, which began with the researcher posing a general question to get to know the participants. More in-depth questions followed. One general question was, "As a Mexican-American mother, how has being a mother changed or shaped your life?" (See Appendix for a full list of first-interview questions.) All six participants took part in the first interview. The interviews occurred in a natural setting, such as the participants' homes or a neutral place of the participants' choosing. I gathered close-up information by talking directly to the participants with face-to-face interactions.

Second Interview

The goal of the second interview was to reconnect with second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and allow them the opportunity to expand on their previous responses. These one-on-one interviews were also semistructured with follow-up questions and lasted up to 1 hour. The second interview took place after the transcription of the first interview recording. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) recommended transcribing the first interviews and then scheduling a follow-up meeting for further discussion, which becomes part of the ongoing narrative. Only five of the six women engaged in a second interview.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

As a qualitative researcher, I was the key instrument in collecting data, conducting two semistructured interviews with participants and then engaging in data analysis to make sense of the provided narratives. All data came from participant interviews. I used both OneNote and a second digital audio-recording device to record all interviews, with subsequent transcription by Rev.com. The interviews took place in Spanish, which was the preferred primary language of three of the six participants. Following receipt from Rev.com, I sent the Spanish transcriptions to GoTranscript.com for translation. I then digitally coded all English-language translations using Dedoose, an online qualitative and quantitative system used to code. All coding files are be password-protected for security.

I kept analytic memos during the interviews, which enabled me to refer back to for data analysis, focusing on my feelings and observations, noting the point in the discussion. Analytic memos was a sense-making tool to capture thoughts that occur during the interviews. Interviews and analytic memos serve as a wide, comprehensive, and concentrated effort to analyze the collection of materials and report the findings.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is the process of examining data through interconnected steps, including organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the data, coding, identifying emerging themes, and representing and interpreting the data (Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I was not confined to a one-step process but moved interchangeably from general and close reading to coding and intensive writing analysis, repeating the process as necessary. Burck (2015) identified the analysis portion of a narrative as an examination of how people re-create their lives. In this qualitative study, data analysis co-

occurred with data collection. Merriam (2002) posited that simultaneous data analysis and collection allows researchers to adjust along the way instead of waiting to collect all data. Merriam asserted that by waiting to analyze data until the collection is complete, the researcher loses an opportunity to gather more reliable and valid data. Through simultaneous collection and analysis, a researcher can test emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent and previous data.

Analysis of Interviews

Data organization is the first step in the data analysis process (Creswell, 2013). I read through the transcripts, field notes, and memos several times as a complete corpus, identifying and threading codes, followed by themes and subthemes. In addition to coding in Dedoose, I hand-coded the data, comparing my notes with the Dedoose results and creating a chart indicating the number of times a theme appeared. In the third round of coding, I developed a graph displaying the frequency of themes, from most to least. From marginal notes to initial coding, a researcher must take in the entire experience as it has evolved. The ultimate goal was to produce a coherent, focused analysis with a robust, comprehensible, and accurate account of the lives of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and their influence on their children's educational experience.

Limitations

Generalization

In the narrative inquiry design, the researcher collects information about the context of lived experiences and provides a setting for individual stories. This narrative qualitative study was specific to a small group of Mexican-American mothers with lived experiences specific to their generational status. Narrative research is best for capturing life experiences, situating

individual stories within a participants' personal experiences, such as those in their homes, jobs, ethnicity/race, culture, and historical contexts (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, what I learned from this research is not generalizable beyond the participants in this study.

Positionality

I am a Latina researcher and an elementary school principal; as such, my positionality warrants discussion as a potential limitation. In my role, I have access to students, parents, colleagues, resources, and experiences in the educational arena. As the researcher, I can select what to write about and what to leave out, and present or frame my positionality into making sense of a social world into written words. According to Creswell (2013), "How we write is a reflection of our interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research" (p. 215). All writing is situated or positioned within a specific stance; thus, I cannot separate that I, too, am a second-generation Mexican-American single mother who takes great pride in my influence over my daughter's educational experience.

As a Latina woman, I bring bias into the study by being the first in my family to attend and graduate from college. Raised by immigrant, blue-collar, working parents, I find my upbringing a fundamental part of who I am. My purpose for serving a student population similar to my upbringing cannot be separated from research. I remained aware of potential bias during the study, as I may have had lived similar experiences as the Mexican-American mothers interviewed. Nevertheless, I recognize that my background and professional experiences influenced the findings, conclusions, and interpretations of my study (cf. Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Creswell et al., 2007).

Summary of Methods

Narrative research is best for capturing life experiences and situating individuals' stories within their personal experiences (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore, document, and analyze the experiences of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and the influence of those experiences on their third- and fourth-generation children's educational attainment at the elementary school level. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted, "Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as a method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways" (p. 10). Clandinin (2006) asserted that a narrative inquiry provides a means "slowing down, pause, and look to see the narrative structures that characterize ours' and others' lives" (p. 51). Engaging in the study of people's experiences allows for self-discovery and the ability to negotiate shared narratives with respect and an openness to multiple voices.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The study was a means to explore the lived experiences of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and their influence over their children's educational attainment. The six participants were mothers whose children attend Title I elementary schools in a southern California county bordering Mexico. The women provided insight into their lives, from birth to childhood to adulthood, aligning their life experiences with first-generation immigrant experiences.

All six participants discussed the complex ways in which their family immigration stories, childhood experiences, and personal experiences with education affected their childrearing practices related to educational attainment. This chapter presents the voices of three individuals selected to represent all six participants. There were several reasons for choosing to focus on only three participants. First, these three cases embody the strengths of Mexican-American mothers and their influence over their children's educational attainment. Also, these exemplars showcase the commonalities among them all as the most salient. For example, the participants presented in this chapter illustrate the main themes of value of education, opportunities, and resilience that emerged in the data analysis across all six participants. Last, given the time and space, I would have presented all individual stories; however, due to common themes, these three participants represented the entire group. This study gave voice to all six mothers who shared their hopes for their children, allowing them to articulate their efforts to define, support, and influence their children's educational attainment.

The three research questions guiding this study were:

1. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers define educational attainment?

2. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's educational attainment?
3. In what ways do gender, race, socioeconomic status, and familial immigration shape how second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's education?

This study had a purposeful sampling method to identify participants. The researcher worked with a parent liaison assigned to two elementary schools in the same southern-border school district. Designation as Title I schools means that federal funds support a diverse population to ensure an equitable and fair education for all. The parent liaison supported the recruitment efforts by identifying mothers who fit the generational definition parameters and ascertaining the parents' interest in participating. The parent liaison then shared a list of interested mothers and their contact information with the researcher.

The participants were second- or third-generation Mexican-American mothers of children who attend one of the two identified Title I schools. Several researchers (i.e., Kao, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005; Salgado, 2015) identified second-generation individuals as native-born of foreign-born parents; in turn, the third generation is native-born with native-born parents and are the grandchildren of immigrants. Five participants fit within this specific definition; one participant was first generation but identifies as second generation. Four of the six participants preferred to use their names and two opted for a self-selected pseudonym. Table 3 lists all participants and their demographic information. Of these, the cases presented in this chapter are Aide, Liz, and Sharlyn.

Table 5 Profile of the Participants

Name	Age	Marital status	Number of children	Education level	Primary language	Home size	Father/ male work status	Generation status	Mother's work status
Aide	40	Married	4	No high school	Spanish	6	Full time	2nd	Full time
Olivia	45	Single	2	Technical school	English	3	Part time	3rd	Part time
Ruby	27	Married	4	GED	English	6	Full time	2nd	Full time
Crystal	36	Married	1	High school diploma	English	2	Full time	3rd	Full time
Liz	38	Married	2	High school diploma	Spanish	4	Full time	2nd	Housewife
Sharlyn	32	Married	2	No high school	Spanish	8	Full time	2nd	Part time

This research occurred through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory, which presents a systematic method of focusing on the developing person within the context of the environment and the interaction between the two. The ecological framework allowed a pathway to understand the interconnected experiences of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers situated within cultural, social, and complex systems. The study was narrative inquiry in design, providing a voice to a population commonly overlooked in research. Chapter IV includes a reintroduction to the conceptual framework for the study, discussion of the participants' information as second- or third-generation Mexican-American mothers, and an exploration of the narrative results related to the three research questions highlighting the major themes using the experiences of three model participants.

Review of the Conceptual Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory served as the theoretical foundation. Understanding the life stories of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers entailed determining the context of their environments and interactions between the five ecological systems independent, dependent, and interdependent of one another. The framework supported the three research questions along with the examination of class and culture connected to the immigration experience, highlighting the significance of the evolution of time during the lifespan of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers. Key elements of ecological systems are the function of the family moving to and from the innermost level to the outermost structures, understanding the historical context of the immigration experience of the participants.

The five elements of the framework (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem) have distinct functions. The microsystem is the deepest level and the immediate setting directly affecting the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1989)—in

this case, the child(ren) of the second- or third-generation Mexican-American mothers. The mesosystem is the immediate structure in contact with the developing child—in other words, the second- or third-generation Mexican-American mother. The exosystem comprises the neighborhood, workplace, and parental practices of the mother that influence her child's educational attainment. Encompassed by the macrosystem are laws, values, assimilation, and SES, all of which contribute to children's academic achievement influenced by their mother. Finally, the chronosystem is the generational influence spanning transitions, providing or hindering pathways influencing the child at the innermost micro level. Ecological systems theory assisted in understanding second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and their families within the cultural and social context to, as Bronfenbrenner(1986) asserted, "…delineate promising lines of research on external influences that affect the capacity of families to foster the healthy development of their children" (p. 723). Figure 1 shows Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework.

Narrative Analysis Results

Interviews

Over 3 months, six second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers participated in interviews to share their lived stories and experiences. Five of the six participants took part in a second interview approximately 1 month after the first. The first interviews included 29 questions (see Appendix) and lasted 1.5–2 hours. Topics included their self-identity and that of their children, their schooling and education experience, their child(ren)'s schooling and education experience, and their social-economic environment. Lasting 50–90 minutes, the second interviews consisted of guided questions based on coded content from the first interview. The follow-up questions were a way to clarify experiences, stories, and hopes for their children.

Data collected from the first round of interviews underwent manual coding, followed by line-by-line or phrase coding in Dedoose for the second interviews, using pattern and value coding.

Introduction of Findings

This chapter presents three major themes—value of education, opportunities, and resilience—constructed from the transcript analysis of three participants: Aide, Liz, and Sharlyn. In line with the three research questions, the women's unique experiences directly reflected the lived experiences of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers. The three themes addressed the first two research questions, honoring the united voices of Mexican-American mothers. Research Question 3 showed the overlap of SES and immigration factors.

The first theme, value of education*,* encompassed the collective voices of the Mexican-American mothers regarding how they make education a priority for their children. These mothers work outside the home to bring in a second income; attend school meetings at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, depending on the ages of their children; and tend to all family needs with limited resources. The mothers have learned to navigate the U.S. educational system to provide opportunities for their children in hopes of a better future.

The second major theme that emerged was opportunities*.* The Mexican-American mothers in this study enacted self-agency with a self-taught knowledge base and self-made opportunities while functioning in an English-only educational system. Their actions and behaviors provide opportunities for themselves, their families, and, more specifically, their children.

The final theme, resilience, is the ability to overcome challenges and struggles. Fueled by overcoming hardships, all participants defined and influenced their children's educational attainment. Although these challenges do not represent the mothers, participants conveyed

strength, resourcefulness, and courage from their resilience, influencing their child's educational attainment and ability to persevere. The following section presents the three model participants, detailing their experiences with the major themes of value of education, opportunities, and resilience, beginning with Aide's narrative.

Participant 1: Aide

Background

Aide is a second-generation Mexican-American born in San Diego to a foreign-born mother and raised by her paternal grandparents. She is married with four children, ages 6, 7, 17, and 22 years. Aide is 40 years old and currently works full-time as an overnight caretaker for the elderly. She married at age 17 and did not complete high school. Her preferred language is Spanish, although she speaks and comprehends English. Aide's eldest child is a 22-year-old son who attends the University of California, Davis (UCD), with an expected graduation date of May 2020. Her 17-year-old daughter is a high school senior who has applied to multiple universities and is awaiting acceptance. Aide's youngest daughters, ages 6 and 7 years, attend a Title I elementary school. Her husband, who is Mexican-born, works construction full-time and is away from home Monday through Friday. Aide is the functional head of the family and pays the bills, cleans the house, works full time, and cares for the four children.

Aide is the only participant who allowed me to enter her home. This act of authenticity and openness provided an opportunity to meet her immediate family and to see her in her role as a mother within the context of her home. She lives in an urban city about 10 minutes north of the Mexico-California border; her apartment complex consists of six apartments on a busy, main street, situated on a corner. The building has three apartments upstairs and three downstairs. When I arrived, she greeted me at the door with a broad smile, and graciously invited me in.

Value of Education

Aide's understanding of the value of education grew from observing her grandparents' principles and behaviors when she was a young child. Aide's parents separated when she was very young. Aide's mother worked in the United States, while Aide and her older sister lived with her grandparents in Tijuana. She described this experience:

> Growing up with my grandmother was—my grandmother worked all the time. She was the kind of person who crossed the border every day to come to work at San Clemente. She and her group of friends would get together at 4:00 a.m., 5:00 a.m. in San Ysidro and go to San Clemente Ranch to work in the tomato, cucumber, and cauliflower fields.
>
> They came and went every day, and did so for many, many years. She was happy that was how they spent their time together. I did what I wanted because my grandfather was at home. He was in charge of taking us to school, picking us up from school, but there weren't many rules or anything. It was like everything was really easy. But we were alone, and my sister and I had to grow up.

Aide did not have to focus on school, relating, "I did what I wanted…there weren't many rules. …But we were alone, and my sister and I had to grow up." This childhood influence affected her parenting, as she decided to make a home where education is a priority for her children. She admitted to having some degree of resentment toward her parents for establishing other families that did not include Aide or her sister, and thus not guiding her and her sister toward an education. She often stated how she is involved in the education of her children because her parents were not involved in hers.

Aide's mom wanted to receive the government assistance she would get while Aide was under the age of 18 years and a U.S. citizen. This action placed an even greater strain on the mother-daughter relationship. Aide shared a story from her adolescence:

> I was about 17 years old when my mom separated from her second husband and brought me to live with her in the United States. I had already lived all my youth and my childhood in Tijuana [with my grandparents]. I had been dating my husband for 2 years and [my mom] wanted to bring me here to live. At that time,

> there were no cell phones, no Internet, nothing, and I got very angry with her. I said, "If I didn't live with you all this time, why are you bringing me here now when I'm almost 17 years old?"

Late adolescence was a difficult time for Aide because she did not want to live in the United States with her mom. She was a 17-year-old residing in Tijuana with her grandmother, and she had a boyfriend. This situation put a strain on her relationship with her boyfriend. Aide became pregnant by her then-boyfriend and decided to marry.

Her mother's absence and life choices shaped Aide's early decisions, leading her to become a mother at the age of 17. She felt that becoming pregnant and getting married was her way out of having to move to the United States. Aide's mother's undocumented status contributed to her absence, as she was unable to enter Mexico. The impact of growing up with her grandparents influenced how Aide works to support her children's educational attainment. She watched her grandmother make a long commute to the United States for work in agricultural fields. Aide does not dwell on her past, having overcome obstacles; she stays positive by not holding grudges against her parents.

Aide's childhood experiences directly led to her maintaining an active presence in her children's education by her making it a priority. Parental involvement in education was something she did not have as a child. She explained,

> That's what I was telling you. That's why I'm devoted to my children. I leave at 7:00 a.m., I come back, I go to parents' school. On Tuesdays, I meet Daniela [parent liaison]. The next day, I meet Dr. Villarreal [parent consultant/speaker]. I apply for loans for [my son] that's at the university. I come back [home] again. Right now, I'm doing the things related to the applications of the one [daughter] that's about to leave. I didn't have that for me.

Although Aide's grandparents loved her, they did not prioritize education. Moreover, financial resources were lean and not available for Aide to further her education, even if she had wanted to. Aide repeatedly mentioned being highly involved in her children's education because

she knows now, as a parent, she has the greatest influence over their academic achievement. Aide relentlessly advocates and values her children's educational attainment. She stated, "I hope that all of them have a career, and that's what I can tell you. In almost every conversation we have, I tell them that the only thing I can do is work a lot to help them pay for their studies because there's not going to be an inheritance. That is the only inheritance I can give them. The key is to study."

It is important to note the statement "there's not going to be an inheritance," or, stated in Spanish, "*no hay herencia.*" Aide, with blunt clarity, acknowledged she does not have anything to leave to her children when she dies. She holds high expectations for their academic achievement so they can ultimately obtain a career and have socioeconomic mobility. Aide explained, "Having to have to grow up so fast, I neglected school." Not afforded opportunities as a child, Aide provides for her children through hard work. Her steadfast focus on the education of her children is her priority, as she elaborated:

> For me, school is very important. I understand that it is very important that they have education and support from their parents. They spend fewer hours at school than at home. I think that education is important, but the support for them to grow in school comes from home.
>
> I do think that is very important, and I think that they are involved in their own education. But I also think that if I didn't instill in them the importance of their education, they wouldn't take it so seriously and they wouldn't be as involved as they are now, and I have confirmed that. When I have to work a lot and I don't push them, they get lower grades.

Aide identified education as "very important" and explained that schools need support from the parents. She owns her responsibility as a parent by having high expectations for her children. She related an example when she was working a lot and her high school son was falling behind on his grades.

> My son was a very good student in elementary school. In middle school, he didn't even go to his graduation because he became a rebel. During high school, he was a bad student. In ninth, 10th, 11th grade, he got punished a lot. No cellphone, not going out, and then, he started to care about his studies again. He went to Southwestern College for 3 years. Now, he is going to graduate in May.
>
> He got punished a lot [in high school]. He had to go to summer school, and he wanted a cellphone so bad, and I didn't give it to him. He wanted my permission to do things, and I didn't allow him. I think that the discipline at home was really exaggerated, and he would compare himself to his friends, "But my friends have cellphones." "No, but I'm the only one who's never there." "No, but—" "Son, start working. That's all you have to do." "No, but everybody will be on vacation." I even went on vacation without him because he was in summer school. "Start working, that's all you have to do, or you're going to come back to summer school next year." That gets to him.

This conversation showed her high expectations for the behavior and academic performance of her children. Aide was fully aware that her actions might have been extreme, remarking, "I think that the discipline at home was really exaggerated." Nonetheless, Aide was aware her son was not doing well in school and held him accountable to go to summer school to make up his credits. She did not waver in her expectations for his behavior and school attainment, and now he is about to graduate from UC Davis.

Opportunities

Aide works incredibly hard to provide her children with opportunities she did not have. By working nights, she can attend her children's school events during the day. She assumes all home responsibilities when her husband is gone. Aide elaborated on her daily and weekly efforts at caring for the family:

> [At home] are my husband and me, my eldest daughter, and the two little ones. My husband is not here during the week because he works outside, in the construction area, from Monday to Friday. He comes here on the weekends. During the week, I work overnight, but I spend all day at home, and my eldest daughter takes care of the others at night.

> I take care for them. I pick them up. I prepare their food and everything. My husband comes here during the weekends to rest, and he brings the check. Then, he leaves again. So, it's as if I were single, but I have the whole package.

When Aide shared "I have the whole package," she meant she was responsible for parenting alone while her husband is away, working all week. With her mornings available, she attends high school meetings supporting her daughter, who is a senior and about to graduate. She attends financial aid and college entrance meetings through the high school. At the elementary school, she takes part in parent meetings and training through a program called Dinosaur School that focuses on social-emotional learning for her first-grader.

In part due to her low-SES status, she provides her eldest son at UC Davis with much-needed information on food distribution, free Uber rides, and chancellor communication via social media. She entered a parent group through the chancellor's office via Instagram and Facebook, explaining, "I follow the chancellor. 'We're having finals. Students will have a late breakfast at 9:00 p.m. this Tuesday.' So I say to my son….'Hey, there'll be free lunch this day.' And he tells me, 'Thank you, that was very useful because we were studying and we went there.' They have waffles or French toast, and they're there, studying."

To help her busy son, Aide uses social media to obtain information. She is grateful for her English skills, stating, "So far, I haven't struggled to understand what they say, thank God." She elaborated on the additional support services she identifies via the chancellor's app:

> Thanks to the group, I found out there's even a sort of Uber for the students. Davis is a small town, like Ramona. So, if they're in a house, at a party until 2:00 a.m., 3:00 a.m., instead of taking a public taxi, a bus, or walking, there's a phone number they can contact now, and there's going to be volunteers every night.
>
> There are volunteers, from the school, who take turns for days and they don't question or charge them; they go for them and take them to the place where they live or sleep, just to prevent things from happening. Because even though it's a small place, things do happen. There have been robberies, thefts, and all that.

She explained the need to seek out such information “not because we’re Hispanic, not because their parents don’t have a degree and pay rent does it mean that it’s not possible to get a degree here. Of course, we can do it. This country offers many opportunities. People just need to look.”

Aide’s determination to take advantage of opportunities and seek educational attainment for her children is rooted in her struggles. For example, she had many responsibilities at a young age and had to grow up quickly without opportunities for an education. At the age of 15, she drove her grandfather from Tijuana to San Diego for his cancer treatments because her grandmother had to work in the fields, and there was no other responsible adult to help. She also married and had her first child when she was 17 years old. The early years of her marriage were not easy due to financial stressors, forcing her and her husband to live with her mother-in-law in Tijuana. She expressed how marriage and raising a baby were not easy at such a young age: “The fantasy of being a couple missing each other was gone. He would go out with his friends, party, whatever, and I would be there as another sister in his house, raising his son with his parents.”

The young couple moved to the United States looking for economic opportunities to raise their family; however, money was scarce and life was difficult. The cost of living in the United States was much higher than in Mexico. Aide explained that all their money went to rent, groceries, bills, and the car payment. Despite financial difficulties, benefits such as health care outweighed their sacrifices and created multiple opportunities for her children. Aide reflected,

> What encouraged me? Well, in this country, there are many opportunities to succeed if you work hard. Anyway, I remember that when they were small [her children] sometimes, I didn’t have enough money, so I went to places where they gave things to me, where they didn’t ask me for proof of income or anything. Churches or whatever, I would get groceries, or sign up at places where they donated toys for the kids.

> Because the money I earned was to pay for the expensive life here in San Diego, for the bills, to pay for the car and that. I'm very grateful to this country for the good health insurance they give you if you're not very wealthy. I was struggling to pay for that like I was struggling in daycare because my mom was still young, and she had to work to pay for her things, and she couldn't take care of my kids.

Aide had a strong work ethic, having had the influence of her grandparents all her life. Even though she and her husband worked hard, their economic struggles continued. Paying for childcare was a challenge. Her responsibilities came with hardships, including the search for donations when her children were young to help them survive as a family. These adversities became her motivation to persevere in the United States, wanting more for her children. Aide maintains open lines of communication with her now-young adolescent children and explains to them how expensive life is, especially if they want to raise a family. She emphasizes the need to study to be able to afford a family and raise children of their own, so they do not suffer the deprivation they had. She related a conversation she had with her children when they were adolescents: "'If you want to have one, or two, or four children like me, you have to make four times the money I made then. If you want to raise them as I did with you.' I mean, we didn't live a life of luxury, but I always took them out, bought them whatever toys they wanted. They have to study. It's the only way. It's the only way."

Aide emphasizes the need for a formal education by using her husband's hard work as an example. He has spent 20 years in construction, which is physically hard, labor-intensive work; as such, he complains about aches and pains. She tells him, "You still have about 20 years to retire; can you make it? Because it's until 62 and we don't have enough savings or anything." She reiterates to her children that they need to take every opportunity to study so they do not have to perform hard labor like their father. She explained, "They may still get a hard time, but at least not because they didn't study. Sometimes you can't even afford to get sick because you

have bills to pay. In a formal [professional] job, you have sick leave, time off, benefits, many things that don't even exist in construction jobs."

Aide tells her children, "Bills don't wait for you to get a job." While her husband has been working construction, she claims, "It was very stressful, but I have always worked. I've never stopped working." She created opportunities for herself by working at Walmart for many years and is now serving as a caretaker, raising her children and providing the household with a second income. She proudly highlighted her work ethic, despite difficult times and working odd hours to help her family:

> I've worked as many things, but I spent 10 years at Walmart in Eastlake. I was a manager. And I started without speaking any English because I studied in Mexico. I was made a manager because I was proactive. I was the manager of the Toys Department, where I started. Then I was in charge of Paper Goods and Chemicals. Then they expanded and sent me to Calexico for training.
>
> I dropped my children at school at 6:30 a.m., because I had to work at 7:00 a.m. I picked them up at 4:30 p.m. because I left at 4:00 p.m. and dropped them off at the after-school. I would pick them up at 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Aide shared how much she earned part-time when she left Walmart: "I noticed I was making pretty good money as a caregiver, about $700 working only on weekends." Her husband helped with the children on the weekends and she was able to spend weekdays at home, supporting the needs of the family. She lamented, "But I sacrificed Christmas, New Year's, Mother's Day, piñatas, and that. I could never go because there was no one to cover me at work."

Aide's opportunities did not come without years of sacrifices. Forfeiting family traditions, holidays, and birthday celebrations had become the norm to provide for the family. Each sacrifice led to a better opportunity. By choosing to leave Walmart, she became a caretaker, a position that led her to her current job. For the past 7 years, Aide has been working as a caregiver 4 nights a week, leaving the mornings and weekends open. She shared, "When I

worked 13 hours a day in the past, I left the older kids to take care of the younger ones; it wasn't fair." She is grateful for the opportunity to sleep in the evening and be home in the morning for her children. Of her schedule, she says, "It's perfect now, as long as it lasts."

In line with the first two research questions, how Aide defines and influences her children includes many sacrifices, many of them based on responsibilities with her grandparents, followed by marrying and beginning a family at a young age. With Aide's strong work ethic, each job opportunity brought a prospect of growth with the gift of time to be with her children. She can attend meetings at her children's schools and expand her knowledge base on the value of an education. Aide's educational aspirations and high expectations for her children are evident in her pursuit of opportunities. Aide influences and defines education for her children through her daily actions. She cares for her family by working hard, cleaning, washing, attending meetings, "the whole package." Aide is a resourceful, motivated, and self-empowered Mexican-American mother who proactively and positively supports and influences the academic possibilities for her children.

Resilience

Resilience was the third theme connected to Research Questions 1 and 2 for the second- and third-generation mothers whose influence and definition of educational attainment impacted their children. Resilience underscores how Aide defines educational attainment and her influence on her children's education, despite her own challenges, economic needs, and immigration experience. Aide's narrative is not that of a traditional linear immigration tale in which she arrived and stayed. Rather, her story is transnational, involving the comings and goings between Mexico and the United States, where her family members worked in the fields. The uncertainty and challenges of this situation became a way of life for Aide. Resilience contributed to her

strength, living in the United States along the Mexican border and working to achieve a better life for her and her family in the United States, otherwise known as *en el otro lado.*

Aide's resilience, tied to her cultural identity and her native language of Spanish, is prominent. For example, Aide describes herself as Mexican bilingual with a preference for speaking Spanish. She referred to the opportunities living in the United States has afforded her and emphasizes her acculturation process and integration into the American culture:

> I'm Mexican. I always tell myself, "I'm Mexican," even if I was born here. However, I want to change that because we owe this country a lot, and I live here. I try to be part of the American culture but I have never stopped feeling that I'm Mexican, even if I was born here. Since the children are in school and they are part of the American culture, I've tried to become a mixture of 70% American and just 30% Mexican. I live here.

Aide is grateful for her opportunities in the United States. She has the opportunity to work in the U.S. labor market, live in the United States, and assist her children in achieving the American Dream. She has acculturated over time, saying she has embraced the American culture, as have her children who attend U.S. schools and universities. Achieving the American Dream for Aide would mean seeing all her children earn a bachelor's degree. Unlike her children, although she was born in the United States, Aide did not have the opportunity to attend U.S. schools.

Raised by her grandparents in the absence of her parents, Aide had her schooling in Mexico, which adds to her narrative of resilience. The absence of parental support in her education leads her to influence her children's educational experiences. She elaborated,

> My parents didn't raise me. My grandmother raised me in Tijuana. My parents split up when I was 2 years old. My parents were very young, and my grandmother raised me. I went to primary school and to high school in Tijuana, and I got married very young. I had my first son when I was 17 years old; he's 22 years old now. I'm still married to my first boyfriend. Five years later, we had our second child; she's 17 years old now. We waited 10 years to have another one, and

> then we had a *pichon* [last child born], who is the youngest. So, we have four children.

Aide described making life-changing decisions at a very young age. She married her husband when she was 17 years old but did so purposefully, deciding to get pregnant to escape living with her mother. At the time, her mother was divorcing her second husband and wanted Aide to live with her so she could apply for government aid. Aide's tenacity and grit may come across as an act of rebellion against her mother, yet her decisions led her to a life of better opportunities. After the couple was married, knowing greater possibilities awaited in the United States, they came to make a life *en el otro lado* with her own family.

Aide's resilient outlook and self-awareness are profound. She is well aware of what she had and did not have as a child. Her knowledge of the sacrifices a mother makes to guide her children toward a valuable educational experience is deep, in part due to her parents' absence and her lack of education. She shared,

> I used to like school a lot, but my parents weren't there to tell me to do my homework, and my grandma has always been softer. She didn't find out if I had any homework or if I had bad grades or not. Even though I was very smart, I always got away with not doing my homework, and my parents weren't there to worry about it or to say, "It's time to buy the books for school."
>
> That also affected my education because, as I tell my children, "You tell me that you need a notebook, and I'll go and buy it for you." When I needed the books, I wouldn't tell my grandma anything [so as] not to bother her. I didn't want her to spend any money on it, so I didn't ask for anything, and that's why I didn't have the things I needed. That makes you feel bad about yourself. You don't feel like going to school because you don't have the materials you need, and you don't have your parents' support to check your homework, discipline, nor anything like that.

Aide exemplifies resilience focused on the absence of a childhood need. Aide's resiliency speaks to issues of self-esteem and poverty. Her resilient childhood experiences have had a profound impact on Aide, leading her to support her children's education proactively.

Aide described her hard work ethic stemming from her grandparents' lives as migrant farmworkers. They were powerful role models, providing a strengths perspective and asset-based model. She explained,

> My grandparents were Mexican. My grandfather worked here in Chula Vista picking lemons, so they gave him amnesty, and he emigrated. He brought my grandmother here and everybody else, too, like my uncles. My dad migrated and my mother didn't.
>
> [My grandparents] emigrated, but most of the time, they were in Tijuana. He worked here, and he would come and go, like people used to do before. They had their house in Mexico, but they had American benefits, such as the pension and everything. My grandpa died, but my grandma still receives her pension. She used to work here, and in San Diego and San Clemente. My grandpa used to work here in Chula Vista, in the lemon farms.
>
> My grandma picked tomatoes, cauliflower, cucumber, and all that. My grandpa worked with lemons. When they retired, they got their pension, but they continued living in Mexico.

Aide's grandparents remained attached to their country of origin, where the cost of living was lower. As a result, the transnationalism of her grandparents fulfilled family and economic needs. Her grandparents were migrant farmworkers, crossing the border each day, yet they were able to purchase a home and reside in Mexico. Their pension earned by working in the United States as migrant farmworkers gave them "American benefits," allowing them to provide for Aide and her sister. Aide's grandparents' transnational experience meant transitions, challenges, and much time alone, having to fend for herself, resulting in resilience and resoluteness that contributed to wellness and her focus on her children's educational attainment.

Aide's narrative was consistent with the first two research questions. Essential to understanding her influence over the educational achievement of her four children and despite the stresses of transnationalism, acculturation, and financial stressors, Aide's focus was on the importance of family. Aide contributes to educational attainment by attending school meetings,

changing her work schedule, and maintaining a household, working at night to help pay for her son's college. Driving her values, goals, and high academic expectations for her children were her resilient and self-created opportunities because of the lack of options available to her. Aide is unwavering in her belief that the American Dream means an education for her children. Aide's actions have always focused on the family unit, responding to what is best for the family. She recognizes the potential of what a college education can bring her children, emerging from adversity with resiliency and opportunities to create transformational and upward mobility for her children.

Participant 2: Liz

Background

Liz is a 38-year-old married mother with two children. Liz holds a high school diploma, with her language of choice being Spanish. Her 9-year-old daughter is attending a Title I school, and her 19-year-old son is currently working with his father and has plans to return to the community college. Her son suffers from bouts of depression and is receiving mental health support. Her husband is the primary breadwinner and she is a homemaker.

Liz's father immigrated from Guanajuato, Mexico, at the age of 15 years, entering the United States as an unauthorized migrant farmworker. Her mother also crossed into the United States at the age of 15 with her family. Liz's parents met as young migrant farmworkers in Greenfield, California, married, and moved the family to Tijuana, Mexico. Liz was the only participant who not second- or third-generation Mexican-American. Although her older brother was born in the United States, she was born in Tijuana, Mexico, as was her older sister. Liz, by definition, is first-generation; however, she self-identifies as second-generation. Despite being born in Mexico, Liz became a transnational immigrant due to her parents' migrant farmworker

status, moving from city to city following the crops, attached to the country of settlement and their country of origin.

Value of Education

The value of education is deeply embedded for Liz and her children, although her son and daughter had different early education. Unlike her experience with her first-born son, Liz shared how she has been more involved with her daughter in an American Title I elementary school. Liz is "part of almost every committee" at her daughter's elementary school. She has daily conversations with her daughter's teacher and principal, taking those opportunities of the U.S. educational system to best reinforce supports at home. When her daughter started her own educational journey in the American school system, Liz began to attend school meetings to understand the structure, process, and curriculum. She explained, "I realized that even if I came to school [in the United States]…I didn't know the system thoroughly. I came for my daughter, though, because…I didn't know how the system worked in elementary. …That's why I started coming to the meetings and getting involved, to learn the system and how elementary works and how they are doing. Now, it's like, 'What about your homework? Did you understand it?'"

Although Liz attended U.S. schools as a child, it is different as a parent. As a parent with aspirations, hopes, and visions for her children, she places a high value on education to benefit them and their future. Liz's attendance at elementary school meetings shows the value she places on education, providing awareness of test scores, budget, and strategies on how to help her ELL daughter. In better understanding her daughter's assignments and school expectations, Liz feels more equipped as a Mexican-American mother within the U.S. school system. She can determine if her daughter understands the tasks assigned by the teacher.

Liz now feels comfortable within the U.S. school system; however, this was not always the case. When her son became of school age, Liz decided that he would attend elementary school in Mexico. She explained, “With him, I decided to do the same thing my parents did with me. In Tijuana, I took him to kinder, to elementary, and I took him to school. I paid for a bilingual school so that he would learn English. ….We lived in El Cajon, California. He was my only child. …I would go and come back every day for several years, and I said I do want him to learn English.”

Having received most of her early education in Tijuana, Liz did the same for her son, ensuring that he could read, write, and speak Spanish well. Her daily sacrifice was to travel over 30 miles each way for 7 years to take her son to school in Tijuana. Forfeiting having her son attend an American school was more important to Liz because she felt learning his heritage, culture, and primary language were required schooling in his country of origin. Liz discussed her choice to have her son attend school in Mexico while the family lived in the United States:

> They must speak Spanish. Whenever they visit their cousins or family members, I don’t want them to be told, “Hey, you don’t speak Spanish well.” I want them to write it and learn how our culture is. Now, my child goes—I found out about dual immersion. Still, when I decided that he had learned Spanish well, writing it and speaking it, he was already in seventh grade.
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> He started [middle school in the United States], and I said, “Well, I made such a big effort. Regarding Spanish, my efforts yielded results, but he started learning English” from scratch. He started learning when he couldn’t speak it, and he caught it quickly because he already knew. Yes, I was always involved.

Family, cultural identity, primary language, and education are all central to what Liz holds essential to raising her children. Cultural identity brings pride and connection to the homeland for Liz when visiting extended family, with reading, writing, and speaking Spanish equally important. For Liz, merely speaking Spanish is insufficient. Liz was involved in her son’s education in Tijuana and engaged again when he was in high school. She stated, “I started

getting involved again when he was in the ninth or 10th grade. I started attending meetings, not only at school, but I was also like, ‘Let’s look at your homework. Let’s see what kind of homework they gave you.’”

As her son grew older, Liz began to step away to give him more responsibility. She wanted her son to develop intrinsic motivation in his education without her nudging him along the way. She clarified,

> I was always there. Then, I decided not to be so involved in the matters of my oldest son when he was in 10th grade. I sat down with him and said, “I spoke with your dad, and we decided that if you want to go to university or another college, you have to research that. You will research what you need, what classes to take, and everything you need.
>
> “If you are not interested in going, then don’t do any research, and we won’t support you. If you do want to go, then we will pay a part, and you are going to pay the rest. Still, you need to research and be interested; otherwise, that will show us that you don’t want to go.” Then, he went ahead and got into honor classes— He did it all for himself, obviously. Still, on my part, I was getting informed. He would tell me some things, and I already knew them because I had already gone to take classes and all.

Liz strongly believed in the value of education as the great equalizer because of the possibilities and future opportunities it creates for her children. Knowing the value of education, Liz wants her son to be motivated and responsible for his education. As such, she and her husband assigned financial responsibility to her son, requiring him to either work after high school and care for himself or go to school with the help of his parents. Liz believes her son needs to be proactive in his educational endeavors to further his studies. Liz has proactively mastered two different educational systems, Mexican and American, to work for her cultural and ideological beliefs, promoting educational opportunities for her children in hopes of better prospects.

Liz, a daughter of migrant farmworkers, now raises her children on both sides of the border. With the complexity of transnationalism, Liz took advantage of the family's location and made a deliberate choice to give her son a Spanish-language education. She traveled between the two countries for years to ensure her culture and the mother language became the focus of her son's early education. Not having had the opportunity to obtain a college education, Liz chose to stay home and raise her son. She has a robust and foundational belief system in education, which is richly tied to her Mexican culture and identity.

Opportunities

Liz realizes opportunities afforded to her children are key factors in their educational success. She spoke to current opportunities and compared school life as she knew it to what it is today.

> I see that it is very different from how it looked when I had to go to school, and I know we didn't have the same tools back then. However, now they have it all. I tell them that the way the system is right now, no child should drop out of school. Now, they get financial aid when they go to university. When they are in elementary, they get not only support for school, but also psychological support. They no longer only worry about them attending and doing their homework but that they are also happy at school.

An optimistic, resourceful motivator for her children, Liz is persistent in supporting them. She is involved in all aspects of the school, sits on the school governing board to help in making decisions on student mental health services, and advocates for a counselor. Liz continued to discuss opportunities for children at a systemic level within a school:

> I see that they have many opportunities, and the system is no longer only focused on them meeting goals but also on how they meet them. That's how I feel things are and, regarding opportunities, they have many. I say to them, "If you don't harness them, it's not because they are not presented to you. It's because you are stubborn and empty-headed. Your life condition changes every time, and you will leave with something for yourself. It will nourish something in you, something different."

About her high expectations, Liz recalled, “Like I always say to the two of them, I don’t expect them to become doctors or something they don’t like. I tell them that I would like for them to finish a career, to get to go to university. If there’s no way to pay for it, their graduation for me will be when they get their diploma. That day, I will be able to say, ‘I did my job.’ Not for me, but because I know that they will be prepared.”

Liz views educational opportunities for her children as two-pronged. First, her goal (as well as the other participants’ endeavors) is for them to obtain a college education. Second, she feels she “did her job” once they have reached that milestone of graduation. She does not necessarily seek a specific job or career titles for her children; rather, she wants for them to be happy, prepared, or *preparados,* for life. Liz elaborated, “

> I want them to study something they like. …It’s not that they will earn anything or have a good job. Rather, it’s that they will wake up in the morning to go to work and earn money, but they’ll go to a place they love. If they choose to study something, they will do it with passion, and they will go to work feeling happy every day.
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> If you don’t study, maybe you’ll work doing something you like, but you will earn less, or you will work the same hours, but sometimes, you won’t go to work feeling happy. …You choose your life, and if you can educate them— Now, there are possibilities and tools. If you want to sweep the streets, then be the best one at it and get a certification for street sweepers. There must be something, but you should like it, and it should make you happy.

Liz’s powerful comment—“You choose your life, and if you can, educate them”—has a culturally embedded meaning. The word Liz used in Spanish was *educar*, which, particularly in a Latino household, has to do with the education received at home. She is teaching her children and instilling in them the passion, opportunities, and happiness available to them. Her influence and increased knowledge of the U.S. school system leads to career expectations that begin with attaining a college education.

Learning the U.S. educational system is the second example highlighting how Liz proactively maximized opportunities to reach her own goals. She placed a high value on learning and education. Although Liz married her husband at age 17 years and quit going to classes, she returned to school when her second child was 3 years old. She commented, “I only have a little bit left to finish. My brother and I went, cheering each other up. We said to the other, ‘If you get your GED, I will get my high school diploma.’ We were like, ‘Okay,’ because he still needed to get many credits to complete his high school diploma.”

This was not an easy time for Liz, who had to leave her children with her mother or husband to attend school in the evenings, which allowed her to be available for her family during the day. Despite those challenges, it was important to Liz to be an example to her children. As a teenager, she had to give up her dream of becoming a high school graduate; however, she achieved that goal years later, at the same time learning how the U.S. educational system worked at the adult level. This newfound confidence inspired Liz to learn about her daughter’s elementary school experience.

When her daughter entered kindergarten, Liz began volunteering at the school. This involvement in her daughter’s education included actively participating in the English Language Advisory Committee, a platform for parents who have children who are ELLs. Liz is a member of the School Site Council, the body that makes budgetary school-wide decisions with school-elected stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and staff. Having had experience with the Mexican educational system, Liz was eager to learn about the U.S. system. She related, “I didn’t know the system thoroughly. I came for my daughter, though, because I brought my son in elementary, but I didn’t bring him [to the United States]. …That’s why I started coming to the

meetings and getting involved: to learn the system and how elementary works and how they are doing."

Liz began to attend school parent meetings in English and Spanish. Understanding the U.S. educational system provided insight as to how to best support her daughter in kindergarten. It was a revelation for her to realize how much her daughter was learning.

> In elementary and kinder, she would do her homework. First, I would help her and then I realized that she could do it on her own. I was scared because things aren't the same here. At home, it's nothing but Spanish, and she got it and I noticed. I was like, "Oh, she learned quickly." She got [started school] in July, and by December, she was doing her homework on her own because she could understand already. She advanced on her own. What I didn't do with [my son]. …With the first one, as I say to my husband, maybe I was on top of him too much. I do the opposite with her. I try to have her do things on her own.

To Liz's surprise, her daughter learned quickly in kindergarten, despite speaking only their primary language at home. She wants to give her daughter a sense of independence early on, as she discovers new wisdom and all the opportunities offered within the U.S. Title I elementary school.

As Liz's involvement at her daughter's elementary school increased, she felt integrated into this new learning community that allowed her to have direct influence over her education. She became an integral part of the school community and added to her repertoire of resources. Liz recalled a conversation with her husband: "What I don't know about, though, is that on my street, I don't know my neighbors beyond, 'Good morning.' However, I come here [elementary school], and at school, it is— My husband says to me, 'You are like Miss Universe because you know everybody.'"

Liz's opportunities uncover patience, understanding, and challenges with her son's mental health encounters led to supporting him at the community college level. Her 19-year-old son faced mental health challenges beginning his senior year of high school. Her son's diagnosis was

temporary amnesia, with medication prescribed for 6 months to a year. The doctor's recommendation was immediately to stop playing high school football due to the severity of his condition. Liz shared, "He played football in his high school, and he used to like it. …He got a medium contusion. Things changed after that, and he suffers from depression, and it was because he went to college [that] I found out."

The college he attended was not his school of choice and certainly not the goal she had set out for him. Her son wanted to attend the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and the agreement was if he did not get in, he would enroll in community college. However, when her son did not get into the university, Liz recalled,

> He said that I had set up that goal for him [to go to college], and I said, "You can go to any university you want to," and he set himself the goal to get into UCSD and he said it's not that easy to get in there. He said to me, "I am afraid that if I don't get in— As always, I told him, "Just try, and if not, it's okay. You go to [community college], study for 2 years and then transfer and that was the plan. Since he didn't get in, he did get depressed because he wasn't admitted into the university he wanted to go to.

Liz illuminated, "He really felt like he could get in, and when that didn't happen, he felt rejected." Having high expectations for her son, Liz accepted that he would attend the community college. However, she could not understand why he stopped going to class after just 2 months. She shared how hard it was to accept that he did not want to continue his education:

> My son should be in college because when he started, he did 2 months during the first semester and got out. Then he started again for 2 months, and both times, he told me, "I started studying for you, but it's not what I wanted. I wanted to take a year off. I want a year, and if you can give it to me without having to work much or study, I promise you that I will go back to studying or whatever. I will study." His year is about to be up, but yes, I was like, "I feel as if I was forcing you." I don't think that's something I would like to know, but they don't harness opportunities.

Liz struggled with validating her son's feelings, accepting his depression, and believing he was dismissing the abundant opportunities afforded to him. He had graduated with honors and

received a bilingual bi-literacy seal of certification in English and Spanish, something of which Liz is extremely proud; still, she worries. Liz knew the implications of his not attending the school of his choice, coupled with his depression, but she did not know the depths of his depression. Liz explained,

> He told me, "I find life is meaningless. Does that make you happy? It doesn't make me happy." He said to me, "I don't see in life what you see." After that, we took care of him. I took him to a hospital and in college, he found counseling. It's hard for me not knowing how to help him because he goes to therapy and all. When I talk to him, and ask, "How was it?" [he does not elaborate, saying] "Just like this. Today went like this," and that's it. Since he is already of age, I can no longer go in and get information straight from his doctor. I can't go in just like that. "It's all right, *Mami,*" he says.

Liz wants the best for her children. She is proactive in her approach, seeking all opportunities possible for them to become well educated in the U.S. school system, whether at the community college or elementary-school level. Her positive parenting skills led her to exploring resources needed to meet the different needs of her children. Equally important, Liz is aware that the current pressing issue is the state of her son's mental health. She emphasized, "First, he has to be all right. He has to be healthy, physically and mentally, because depression is something that must be monitored." Liz's driven search for educational opportunities for her children is tied to her resilient background, giving her narrative voice and supporting Research Questions 1 and 2.

Resilience

Family life is vital to Liz, as is the well-being of the members of her family. Thus, it is necessary to continue the narrative on her son's depression, providing a more detailed portrayal of family life connected to mental health. This representation, intersected with wellness and adaptability, highlighted Liz's resilience as a Mexican-American mother in obtaining support and treatment for her son.

Her son did not come to her about his depression and the decision to withdraw from school. Instead, Liz saw on his computer he had not been going to class, instead pretending he was going to school, driving to campus, and waiting in the library until it was time to go home. Liz confronted her son, who admitted he was not attending his classes and, as Liz stated, "He told me, 'I find life is meaningless.'" Once she realized he needed immediate medical attention, she recalled,

> We started investigating. I went to the place and wondered, How do I approach them? Because at that time, he did not have insurance. I have my insurance with SIMSA [medical coverage in the United States allowing patients to see medical doctors in Mexico], but that involved going to appointments outside [America]. My son had Medicare, but it had just expired or was going to expire because of his age. I was worried. I thought, How am I going to help him because I know that is a very expensive thing?
>
> I said, "I'm going to include him over there [Mexico], but I'll have to go all the way there." To me, the doors were closing for me— I started reading thoroughly the Southwestern College website where it said, "Help." I started reading they had help and therapists there.

She was able to reach out to the community college and get the support her son needed. They told her, "I'm going to direct you to somebody who will be able to help you, where they have a psychiatrist." Liz revealed,

> That's when they started treating him, and they made a support group for him. He's got direct contact with the nurse or therapist, whom he always talks to almost once a week. He's got his psychologist and his psychiatrist, whom he sees every 3 months.
>
> Yes, it's a team. I haven't met them. I've let him go and do it by himself. He can tell me whatever he wants to tell me. I just ask him. "I can't tell you," he says, but what he tells me— He did bring me the sheet when they gave him everything. He told me, "It's just that it's like a whole team. It's all of us." …He does have their support, and it's been going very well. I hope so.

Liz's resilience and focus on the educational supports for her son are limitless, regardless of the absence of resources. She expressed how open her son was to accepting the need for help

because of her proactive approaches. She attended some mental health courses at her daughter's school on first aid for teenagers and adults' mental health. Liz would share this information with her family, particularly her son, at the dinner table. When she talked about depression, he asked her, "Do you think I might have that?" She told him, "You've got many symptoms." He said, "I do want help, but just give me a few days." Liz's intuitive resilience propelled her son to seek much-needed help. Liz recalled telling her son, "From this point on, I'll support you. I'll give you a hand, but I need this to be something that you want to do. Every decision you make, I need them to be something that you want to do, not something that I agree with."

Liz's narrative findings were consistent with the first two research questions. She influences and defines the educational trajectory of her children by attending school meetings, maintaining the household, and assisting her son, who struggles with depression. Salient factors related to her values, goals, and high academic expectations for her children are her resilient and self-made opportunities. Withstanding barriers reinforced Liz's resilience in search of financial resources at the community college to provide her son with the help he so needed. Liz's commitment reassured her son, now an adult, that his life choices hold him accountable. Liz wants her son to take responsibility for his mental health condition. She told her son, "That's something that you need to do by yourself that I can't do for you." Despite the distress of economic uncertainties compounded by adversity with an adult son who battles depression, Liz navigates and breaks down barriers to help shape her son's educational landscape, even at the community college level. Her unwavering belief in the American Dream is consistent with her actions, belief systems, aspirations, and high expectations, overcoming hardships to maximize opportunities and supporting her children's upward mobility through education.

Participant 3: Sharlyn

Background

Sharlyn is a 32-year-old, married, second-generation Mexican-American mother of two daughters, ages 7 and 13 years. Her eldest daughter has an individualized educational plan (IEP) and receives special education services and speech therapy. Raised by her grandmother in Mexico, Sharlyn faced childhood trauma with a sexual abuse incident by a family friend. She returned to Tijuana, Mexico, dropping out of high school in 10th grade, but then returning to finish high school. Adolescence was a trying time for Sharlyn as she battled drugs, homelessness, and extreme hardships. She currently works part-time at an elementary school. Her parents were transnational, which means they worked in the United States but lived in Mexico due to the high cost of living in *el otro lado*. Out of necessity, Sharlyn currently lives in a multifamily household that includes her parents, her brother with his wife and child, and her husband and their two children. Sharlyn cares for her mother, who has received a diagnosis bipolar affective disorder. The themes resulting from the narrative analysis of how Sharlyn values education, her opportunities, and her resilience follow.

Values of Education

Sharlyn especially values education for her children, having had to learn how to navigate special education services for her eldest daughter. Despite having limited resources, she learned to traverse the complex special education system along with its focused language, legalities, and expectations. Additionally, Sharlyn had to accept and understand that her daughter has a learning disability, identifying strategies to best support her daughter, both at home and at school, with an IEP. When Sharlyn noticed her daughter had a slower rate of learning compared to her peers, she explained, "With a psychologist, I found somewhere else, and they recommended me to give her

all the support possible from the district. They gave [the IEP] to her in fifth grade, and she's still receiving [special education services]." She continued, "During all her elementary years, she always had two Cs and a C average. …I'm looking at the fruits of my effort now because it's really tough for me as a mother." By seeking a psychologist on her own, Sharlyn was able to document and advocate for her daughter's educational needs. She held the district responsible as a public learning educational agency responsible for providing a free and appropriate education.

As a mother with no other experiences to compare her first-born daughter to, she assessed those involvements to her own. She stated, "I was kind of a nerd in school; I almost graduated cum laude." The journey of acceptance was difficult for Sharlyn, who related,

> I was very smart…so, to see your first child be like that is kind of shocking, like, "What have I done wrong?" You start blaming yourself, but I just thought, "Okay, it took her long to be able to speak." I have been to so many workshops and I now understand why my daughter is like that.
>
> I understand she has a learning disability. She didn't start speaking when she was supposed to. She wasn't mischievous, she never talked to me, she didn't ask things of me, she barely communicated, but I understood what she needed, as a mother understands everything their child conveys. She crawled normally when she needed to, but I can't say the same for her speech.

With a value on education, Sharlyn felt guilty and asked herself, "What have I done wrong?" She blamed herself, yet after taking workshops, she understood her daughter had a disability that delayed her speech development. Although her daughter has had an IEP for 6 years now, Sharlyn is concerned because her 13-year-old daughter does not act her age. When she acts up, Sharlyn often thinks, "'Wow, she's a little too big for that.'" There have been so many diagnoses that I don't even know which one to pick, and they said, 'Once your child falls behind during a development stage— If she started speaking late, and she didn't do mischief, then she'll start doing them later.'"

In a recent meeting, Sharlyn was stunned to hear how delayed her daughter was. She commented,

> I also went to an IEP meeting in the school, and they said, “Your daughter is 13 years old, but that’s not her age mentally. She’s younger mentally.” When they said that, it was shocking for me, I was like, “What?” I said, “Well, my daughter is big. She’s 13 years old and she’s taller than me.” It was hard for me to grasp this as a mom. …She’s 13 years old, but she has the capacity of understanding of a 10-year-old.

As Sharlyn places a high value on education, the reality of her daughter’s delayed learning progression was difficult to hear. Sharlyn believed her daughter’s mischief was diminishing as she was becoming a young adolescent. Sharlyn feels a sense of guilt and overprotection of her daughter, saying, “Sometimes I think it was my mistake, but then I think, well…I dedicated 5 years to each of them.” She has been present as a mother, protecting and advocating for her daughter’s needs. She motivates and challenges her daughter, even in math, her hardest subject.

Recently, her daughter wanted out of her special education Study Skills class, but Sharlyn would not allow it. Her daughter said that her teacher “scolds her, that she doesn’t listen to her.” Sharlyn related,

> Her problem is that she doesn’t focus; that’s the issue. She is also the Study Skills teacher and being there is helpful for her IEP. Study Skills is about being more organized and learning to focus, and also learning about everything she needs to learn.
>
> That’s what I said, but I haven’t heard her complain any more. She only tried once. I guess she thought, “Mommy always helps me, she saves me. She removes obstacles from my path. I’ll tell her,” and I said, “Listen. No. I changed that other teacher [for you]…but I won’t change this teacher because of that reason.”

Sharlyn understands the need to keep her daughter focused in her Study Skills special education class; she also knows her daughter’s challenges. Emphasizing the value of education Sharyln tells her daughter, “Everyone learns differently,” although the girl feels smart enough.

Sharlyn has experienced an array of emotions ranging from anger to guilt; however, she has gained an appreciation on how best to support her daughter. In valuing education, Sharlyn has been able to foster educational opportunities for both her girls.

Opportunities

Sharlyn wants the educational experience to be different for her children, and for them to have opportunities she did not have. Sharlyn's hardships stem from humble beginnings with limited upward social mobility to currently living in a multifamily home out of necessity. She creates opportunities in two ways: (a) persistence with parental supports at home and at school and (b) motivation based on living in poverty.

Sharlyn does all she can to attend school meetings, including her daughter's special education annual meetings, and volunteering at their schools, including in the classrooms. Sharlyn has high hopes for her children, embracing opportunities with tireless parental supports at home and school. Sharlyn remains present in the lives of her young daughters, knowing her impact as a mother. She only works part-time as a noon-duty at a neighboring elementary school to be available during the mornings and available for pick-up after school. She elaborated, "That's why, with my daughters, I thought, 'if they end up being bad, it'll be because of me. If they end up being good, it'll be because of me, not because of anyone else." She owns her mothering—both good and bad—valuing her relationship with her daughters and encouraging their educational journey, regardless of learning disabilities.

Interconnected with living in poverty is the second example of how Sharlyn creates opportunities. She did not attend college, explaining, "I got pregnant and we did nothing; that is why we got stuck [in low-SES]." She was open about a conversation with her daughter:

> In stories about princes, the commoners are poor; they are servants. The princess doesn't do anything. My youngest daughter once told me, "I'm not going to do

> anything when I grow up. I'm a princess." I said, "So, you're a princess?" I asked her. "Yes, Mommy. Where's your castle?" I'm a tough mom, even cold, arguably; I don't give them the wrong idea or expectation. I told her, "Look, I can't see your castle. If you were a princess, I'd be a queen. Because the princess's mother is the queen. I don't have a driver to drive me around, I don't have a castle, I don't have 30 servants. I'm not a queen, you're not a princess, so we all need to work." In terms of that, where she never wants to do anything, I told her, "We all need to help here. We all live here; we will all help around the house."

Sharlyn sets clear expectations with her daughters, establishing that the family does not have wealth or own their own home, instead sharing a room in the house they rent with five other family members. Sharlyn described herself as a tough mom, stating, "There are certainly no fairy tales in real life for my daughters. …I don't give them the wrong idea or expectation." She is precise and direct in her language, setting expectations, providing realistic opportunities, and reinforcing the importance of education. She described,

> With the oldest one, more than anything, I always tell her that I have no money; the inheritance I am going to leave for her is her education. That if she wants to do something with her life or if she wants to have something, she has to go to school. I always tell her to raise her grades, to go ahead and develop and prepare herself, because now we don't even have an apartment.
>
> My daughter says, "Mommy, I want to live in a bigger house." [Sharlyn tells her], "Okay, we have to fight, because I also have to work harder. When I am not there, your father will be there."

Socioeconomic factors are significant motivators in creating opportunities for her children. For Sharlyn, there is no familial wealth and no monetary "inheritance" for her children. Because poverty is a reality, she knows education is the pathway for future opportunities and possibilities for her children. Sharlyn's daughter looks up to an extended family member who is attending college. Due to a lack of resources, Sharlyn's relentless attempts to create opportunities for her daughters are challenging, thus requiring resilience, guidance, and high expectations.

Resilience

Sharlyn demonstrated resiliency in influencing her daughters' education in two ways: (a) courage and a deep sense of strength derived from a traumatic experience as a young adolescent living in a drug house, or *picadero*, and (b) a second traumatic experience of sexual abuse. Sharlyn is determined to be an outspoken and involved parent in her daughters' schools, both at the elementary and middle school levels. She has served on several committees and volunteers at her children's school.

Sharlyn's life as an adolescent was difficult. She recounted a pivotal traumatic life experience as a young teen living in a Mexican drug house: "An ex-boyfriend came [to me] at the age of 16, 17. My mother was in crisis [mental illness], and that man said beautiful things to me. He said, 'Let's go. Let's go.' I was in love; I was stunned—I don't know, blinded. He was a drug addict, but I didn't care. Knowing it, I went with him, to live with him, and we even lived in a *picadero*."

Sharlyn indicated she was not a drug user but became part of the culture. She was in a vulnerable position because her mother was mentally ill. She followed her heart instead of her mind, knowing the boyfriend was a drug addict. She reflected, "Now that it all happened, how did I get to that? But I was in the situation that my mother [was ill]. I was a teenager. I've always liked adrenaline and my boyfriend told me, 'How about we go? …Let's go.' At 8:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m. and in Tijuana, 'Let's go to my house. Let's go. Let's go,' and I didn't come back."

Sharlyn explained how she was able to leave her drug-addicted boyfriend:

> He had a sister in Moruga [where the *picadero* was located], a very ugly colony. He put me there. According to them, I was pregnant, and because they said I was pregnant, I also thought I was pregnant. Literally, I got a false pregnancy, because even I thought my belly and I thought I was pregnant, I swore I was pregnant, but I was on my period and I knew I was on my period. In that house, they gave me a bed, a bedroom; they never mistreated me.

Her friend found her when her boyfriend was not home and convinced her to return home to her parents. Shaylyn recalled, “I went home; they no longer let me out. They gave me a pregnancy test; I wasn’t pregnant, but I didn’t crumble. They started bathing me, restoring me.” However, she clashed with her family even after her rescue and wanted to look for her boyfriend. When her grandmother told her, “*Mija*, you are an American; finish school if you still want to,” Sharlyn returned to her high school and, “almost with honors,” earned her high school diploma.

Having lived in a *picadero* does not define Sharlyn. Her voice exemplifies her fortitude and resilience from her hardships and early experiences, influencing how she parents. Sharlyn has demonstrated she is a fighter and a warrior, illustrating the significance of an education for her children. She is active at the school, is on multiple committees, and volunteers in her daughter’s classroom. By being present at the school, she has come to understand how an education can afford her children a better future with opportunities that, for many different reasons, she did not have.

A second example of Sharlyn’s resiliency that determines how she parents and protects her children is an incident of childhood sexual abuse by a family friend. At the time, Sharlyn was living in Tijuana with her grandparents. She said,

> My grandfather had an iron workshop downstairs in his lot and there was— I loved going there because I was very curious, whatever, seeing what was in there. And they always told me, “Don’t go in there. there are too many men.” There was a man there who even touched me one time…
>
> I never said anything. I kept growing, and the man was there, quiet. One day, I was drawing something, and the man wrote, “I love you.” A 40-year-old man to a 7- or 8-year-old girl. I paid no attention to it; I’ve never gotten hung up with things. I just let it go.

Her grandmother, whom she adored, passed recently away. Her grief has been extremely difficult to manage. Additionally, the trauma infused at this time in childhood hardened her. She related,

I've always been very taunting, even with my husband. Very defiant, a strong woman; I won't take 'no' for an answer if I don't want to. …Like I say to my husband, I used to be very loving, very detailed, all caring, to everyone. I was very loving, but as life went on—boyfriends, heartbreaks, disappointments, everything—you start building walls, like, "Okay, there it is." When my grandmother passed, I didn't cry because I saw my mother crying, everyone crying, and I said, "I need to be strong; my mother is in a bad place."

Despite her trauma, Sharlyn retains a positive outlook. She continued, "Besides that, I had a good childhood. During my teenage years, I started to live with my mom." Sharlyn's resiliency developed from her traumatic childhood experience, now shaping and influencing how she protects her children from what she once had to confront. Sharlyn's actions are focused on the education of her children. She takes sole responsibility for their future.

Sharlyn's narrative findings were consistent with the first two research questions and essential to understanding her influence over the educational achievement of her two girls. Notwithstanding living in a *picadero*as an adolescent, enduring sexual abuse as a child, currently living in multifamily home by necessity, and having to learn to navigate special education and its legalities, Sharlyn demonstrates resilience, supporting her children in achieving and maximizing their potential. Sharlyn works part-time to be available for her daughters, attends school meetings, and actively participates in her daughter's IEP meetings. In addition to caring for her ailing mother, her low SES of living in poverty factors into Sharlyn's "tough as nails" persona. These challenges, compounded by the stress of strained family life and limited access to

resources, contribute to Sharlyn's resilient and self-created opportunities to establish a brighter educational pathway for her children.

In this study, the lived experiences of the three women highlighted represented all six participants in answering the first two research questions. The narratives presented by the models supported the major themes of value of education, opportunities, and resilience. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory provided a framework for the first two research questions, representing the voices of the Mexican-American mothers as constructed by themes. Research Question 3 incorporates an analytical and holistic approach, highlighting the most salient factors of SES and immigration.

Research Question 3

Different from Research Questions 1 and 2, answering Research Question 3 entailed addressing it holistically, highlighting only the salient factors of SES and immigration. The third research question was: In what ways do gender, race, socioeconomic status, and familial immigration shape how second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's education?

Bronfenbrenner's (1989) theory presents a series of lenses through which to view individuals and their lives. In this study, the data outcomes indicated that life is much more complex. The women did not provide evidence that any of these factors were singularly influential; rather, they overlapped with one another. Research Question 3 is much more analytical. To honor the collective voices of all participants, it is imperative to construct their narratives as a whole. Some sections of Research Question 3 were much more conclusive and interpretive—specifically, SES and immigration, as opposed to gender or race. The participants

had all forged new pathways from their experiences, taking advantage of opportunities for their children.

As interpreted by the Bronfenbrenner (1989) lens, all six mothers had made choices based on their SES. Most needed two incomes to sustain their families. They have constructed their schedules to meet the needs of their children, using their careers to create and maintain opportunities for their children. The mothers maximize the value of education by finding access, opportunities, and resources for their children, mitigating their SES. The women did not talk about gender specifically; rather, their gender roles came from their devotion as mothers. As a result, there was much overlap between SES and immigration with generational influences.

Socioeconomic Status

A salient holistic factor among all participants was SES. Furthermore, the overlap between SES and the immigration influence was prominent throughout the interviews. Not highlighted in the data were race and gender. Instead, the participants presented a deeply interwoven mother role centered on their SES, making career choices to stay home when needed while creating and sustaining opportunities for their children. A model example is Sharlyn's narrative of her grandmother's influence.

Although both Aide and Sharlyn were raised by their grandmothers, Sharlyn's narrative showed the intersectionality of SES and immigration. Out of financial necessity, Sharlyn currently lives in a multifamily home with her mother, father, brother, sister-in-law, nephew, husband, and two daughters. Sharlyn based her parenting practices on her grandmother, her primary female role model, best friend, and confidant. She does not have this closeness with her mother, who suffers from bipolar affective disorder. Sharlyn recalled a difficult situation specific to her mother's depression:

> One time, my nephew told me…"You can stay with us," because they heard about the situation, and I told my dad that they were inviting me to their house because my mother was not well, and he said, am I running away? I sleep with her. We don't know if she sleeps with a knife under her pillow. I sleep with her. I put up with her every night. I endure her crises. I'm not running away, so we're all going to learn something from this situation, he said.

Sharlyn established close relationships with her two young girls, something she did not have with her own mother in Mexico. The intersectionality of immigration was when Sharlyn lived with her mom and dad once in elementary school in the United States. Sharlyn's disconnect with her mother drives her to be the best parent she can to her children. Through this connection, Sharlyn can construct positive educational opportunities for them, something she did not have.

Immigration and **Generational Influences**

Immigration and generational influences were common across all participants' experiences; however, Liz's story is a model all-encompassing, exemplifying the historical context and influences on future generations. Despite the factor of race associated with entering the lowest labor market as a migrant farmworker in the United States, neither race nor gender emerged as significant factors.

Liz's tales of her family's immigration experiences provided an answer to Research Question 3 in that transitions over time influenced the SES of future generations. Liz shared the historical context of her parents' status as transnationals, moving between the two worlds of Mexico and the United States. She described,

> The thing is that they went from Guanajuato to Mexico City. My first brother was born there, the eldest. Then, my mom came back to Mexico, to Guanajuato. Then, she went from there to Tijuana [where] they found a house. Since then, we would come here [Tijuana] for some time every now and then, and that's what we've been doing. We went through our entire high school renting here [United States] and staying there [Mexico].

Liz expressed how her family migrated from deep southern Mexico to Mexico City, ultimately making their way north within Mexico before entering the United States. Liz and her siblings attended school in the United States and lived in Mexico. She explained, "Once we were here, we stayed in different cities [with her parents working as migrant farmworkers]. We'd stay in one for 5 years, sometimes less, 2 years or 1 year. It depended. …We rented."

Moving from city to city was a challenge for Liz and her family. There was little to no stability as a farmworker. Liz shared her father's story as he began as a migrant farmworker in Greenfield, California, near Salinas:

> He'd plant in the lettuce field and the celery field. Most of the time, it was over there in Sacramento— No, not Sacramento. Soledad, Salinas. …He did do that for a few years. They'd work ever since they were 15 when they came. My dad first came when he was 15 years old until he was about 20 years old, 20-something years old.
>
> They [her parents] met while they were working [crops in the fields]. My mom tells me, "From furrow to furrow, we would talk and cut. Depending on whether it was lettuce." …Almost always, they say, they were called on the same teams. If some people worked here, they already knew that next time; after that season ended, another vegetable's season followed and they would work there. That is where they met.

Liz's parents migrated north from Mexico separately, making unauthorized entry into the United States. Their immigration experiences involved transnationalism, with immersion in the two countries coupled with a low SES. Living on both sides of the border brought about complexities, with the family unable to afford to raise a family in the United States until much later, when Liz was in middle school. Nonetheless, the family unit was vital to her parents. Liz articulated the many labor-type jobs her father had before starting his own landscaping company, including working as a gardener, in construction, and at Costco.

Addressing Research Question 3 showed an interdependence between SES and immigration for Liz and her family, not only when growing up, but as an adult raising her own

children. When Liz was a child, her family endured hardships, such as moving frequently once they came to *el otro lado*. This intersectionality of immigration and low SES shapes and influences Liz as a wife and how she mothers her two children. Knowing the opportunities an education can provide her children, Liz parents with her past lived experiences in mind. She embeds transnationalism in her practices, encouraging upward social mobility for her children with motivation through high expectations for academic achievement.

The analysis and results for Research Question 3 focused on honoring the voices of the mothers as a whole, with SES and immigration as the most prominent factors. Through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory, the mothers' experiences are evident as separate entities; the data analysis, however, showed otherwise. There was much overlap between the spheres of influence and the intersectionality of SES and immigration. The mothers are forging new pathways based on their SES, which determines, shapes, and affects how they parent. The participants are justifying and modifying their socioeconomic circumstances to discover opportunities for their children.

Summary

This study gave voice to a group of Mexican-American mothers of the second or third generation (with the exception of one participant who self-identifies as second-generation but, by definition, is first-generation). The six participants shared their hopes and visions for their children through semistructured interviews, and articulated how they define, influence, and shape their children's educational attainment.

The three research questions guiding this study were:

1. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers define educational attainment?

2. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's educational attainment?
3. In what ways do gender, race, socioeconomic status, and familial immigration shape how second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's education?

The results of the first two research questions came from participants' lived experiences highlighting the major themes of value of education, opportunities, and resilience. Data analysis focused on three strong models who represented all six participants. The results of the narrative analysis from the first two research questions illuminated Bronfenbrenner's (1989) framework with a focus on themes to highlight how the mothers influence and define educational attainment.

Addressing Research Questions 1 and 2, the theme value of education framed the notion of aspirations, motivation, and high expectations the mothers held for their children. The participants had sacrificed much to live in the United States. Regardless of lived transnationalism as a significant factor limiting participants' upward social mobility and resources, the mothers did what they could to provide educational opportunities for their children. The second theme, opportunities, showed the Mexican-American mothers as having a combined strong cultural identity and belief system. Through self-created opportunities with an asset-based set of strengths and a strong cultural identity, the mothers supported and defined their child's educational attainment. The women in this study prioritized their children's education, making their own careers, opportunities, or choices to stay home a benefit secondary to this value. Last, the resiliency evident in the Mexican-American mothers' experiences influenced how they parent. Their childhood experiences included a myriad of multifaceted impacts, such as previous

generational influences, complex immigration experiences, transnationalism, lack of resources, and new learned educational systems in the United States. Their families had remained tied to Mexico because of complex financial and familial obligations, which affected each participant in different but significant ways.

Compared to the themes drawn from Research Questions 1 and 2, Research Question 3 was deeply intertwined and unique, presenting a holistic approach highlighting the most salient factors of SES and immigration. The data drawn from Research Question 3 showed that the lives of the women were not separate entities, unlike those proposed by Bronfenbrenner, but multifaceted, interrelated, and interconnected factors intersecting with SES and immigration. For Research Question 3, the intersectionality of SES and the immigration experience is profound and deep, with transnationalism as a possible deterrent to upward social mobility. These mothers are aware of living in two worlds; nevertheless, they are courageous, often displaying unbelievable strength.

It is imperative to understand the intersectionality of SES and familial immigration and the depth of the richness. Race and gender were not salient factors. A fundamental finding is how second- or third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence, define, and ultimately shape their children’s educational attainment through their own experiences. These women’s roles are intricate, complex, and certainly not linear. They draw from both worlds: being a Mexican and being American. Despite the women’s resilience, high expectations, belief systems, transnationalism, and certainty in the value of education, their SES hinders social mobility. The results of the study showed these women’s pride, hopes, and dreams are with their children because they did not have the same opportunities. All participants presented through the lens of a familial context the value they placed on education, and how their own experiences have shaped,

and will continue to shape, the landscape of their child’s educational journey. Chapter V revisits this chapter’s findings to present implications, recommendations, and knowledge advancements.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Overview of the Statement of the Problem

Scholars have deliberated whether years of education have improved, worsened, or stagnated the prospects for upward mobility for successive generations of Mexican-Americans (Duncan & Trejo, 2018; Haller et al., 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). Educational achievement is a salient issue for Latino students due to the increasing Latino population in the United States; thus, the success of these students is vital to the economic growth of the country. There is evidence that Mexican immigrants and their future generations stand distinctively at a crossroads that began at the origin of immigration, making them less likely to obtain jobs that will provide upward mobility (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). As Mexican immigrants enter the United States at the bottom of the economic hierarchy, if successive generations do not experience educational attainment to elevate their SES status, stagnation will continue for generations to come. To circumvent academic inertia and in light of the asset-based findings in this study, it is important to understand how mothers encourage, motivate, and resourcefully lessen the impact of low SES to influence their children's educational experiences.

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore, document, and analyze the experiences of second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers and the influence of those experiences on their third- and fourth-generation children's educational attainment at the elementary school level. The findings indicate that second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers draw upon their own resilience, encouraging their children to pursue higher education. Consequently, generational differences in parental narratives do not account for the educational stagnation.

Study results further show the stories of mothers fueled by their own optimism for their children to attain social and economic upward mobility. Understanding the influence of second- or third-generation mothers whose children attend Title I schools provides insight into how they define educational attainment and, ultimately, how gender, race, SES, and familial immigration influences shape the educational attainment of their children. This chapter provides a summary of the study, discussion of the results, implications for theory, limitations, and suggestions for ways in which this research can impact and support the educational arena.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers define educational attainment?
2. In what ways do second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's educational attainment?
3. In what ways do gender, race, socioeconomic status, and familial immigration shape how second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence their children's education?

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory served as the framework to explore second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers' influence on their child's educational experience. The theoretical framework provided a lens to understand the voices of the mothers, examined through various processes within their family context. In telling participants' stories, I connected the five systems of the ecological framework to better understand the intersectionality of the systems and how they do not work in isolation.

This study was a narrative inquiry that allowed the participants to give direct voice to their experiences. Data collection came from two interviews with each participant, except for one who was unavailable for a follow-up. Three major themes emerged from Research Questions 1 and 2; findings for Research Question 3 proved to be more holistic and intersectional. The findings informed the discussion in this chapter and guided the implications, future consideration, and limitations of the study.

Methodology

Based on purposeful sampling, participants solicitation was through a parent liaison from two Title I schools, followed by recruitment from the parent liaison who understood the requirements of the study. Six female biological mothers over the age of 18 years who identified as either second- or third-generation Mexican-American took part in the study. The women were 27 to 45 years old; the number of children they had ranged from one to four, ages 6 to 22 years. All elementary school-aged children attended one of the two identified Title I schools. With the option of using English or Spanish in the interviews, all participants selected Spanish.

Summary of Results

The results indicated that second- or third-generation Mexican-American mothers valued education. The women's insightful parental narratives showed support for upward social mobility dependent on educational attainment and academic success for children. Given that schooling is a significant contributing factor for future occupational opportunities, hearing the voices of the mothers who influence Latino educational attainment over successive generations is essential. In all, the narratives of second- and third-generation women reflected a deep understanding of Mexican-American children of the third or fourth generation and their future educational trajectories and educational attainment.

Answering the first two research questions entailed exploring how the mothers defined educational attainment and how they influenced their children's academic achievement. Three major themes emerged from the narrative data analysis: value of education**,** opportunities, and resiliency. All participants placed a high value on education, motivating and setting high expectations and aspirations for their children to pursue an education. The value of an education embedded within their parental practices was indicative of the families' social structure. Second, these mothers resourcefully learned to create opportunities and navigate the American school system despite the absence of resources, limited language ability, and challenging family characteristics. They found opportunities through perseverance, fulfilling their responsibilities as mothers, benefitting the entire family unit, mitigating their low economic means, and setting high educational expectations for their children. The participants demonstrated a resiliency of overcoming hardships through much personal sacrifice, not for an individualist benefit, but for the good of the family unit. Their resolute, resilient belief systems, tied to their strong cultural identity, were tied to adaptability, showing their strengths as mothers.

Research Question 3 was a means to explore how gender, race, SES, and family immigration shaped how the mothers influenced their children's education. Research Question 3 posited a systematic and holistic value, bringing not just one influential factor, but a complex intersectionality between SES and immigration influences. Race and gender were not salient factors in the findings and, therefore, not discussed.

The overlapping of themes merited addressing Research Questions 1 and 2 together. The discussion focused on the factors of resiliency, including the strengths generated from famililism and elaborating on cultural identity. The second section of this discussion centers on Research Question 3, exploring the intersectionality of the contextual immigration experience with a focus

on transnationalism and its impacts on SES and upward mobility. The low SES of the Latino population reinforces the need for equitable educational opportunities supporting students at all levels of the academic spectrum to reach their highest potential, with the goal of upward social mobility.

Discussion of Results

Resiliency

The concept of resilience exemplifies motivation, persistence, and aspirations demonstrated and voiced by the mothers in this study. Despite initial appearances and characterizations of the participants mainly by needs and deficits, these are inaccurate or skewed portrayals of their daily lives. Research suggests the family background is extremely important in determining life choices (Bankston & Zhou, 2002; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Portes et al., 2009). A strong family background was a common factor among the participants. The mothers all took active roles in the educational attainment of their children, creating positive conditions for adaptation to the school environment closely linked to remaining in school. The mothers' stories mirrored Schmid's (2001) finding that school achievement is one of the best predictors of future economic success. The mothers were deeply aware that educational success could lead to economic achievement and security.

Bermudez and Mancini (2013) clarified the different resilient domains and provided a distinction between individual, family, and community resilience, as proposed by Cardoso and Thompson (2010). These resilience factors, otherwise known as common themes of resilience among Latino families, reflect and create a clear overlap to the theoretical framework within the five systems: micro (child), meso (mother), exo (neighborhood, extended family, work, etc.), macro (values, beliefs, laws, etc.), and chrono (transitions over time).

The findings clearly showed the overlap between the forms of resilience. For example, specific to individual resilience, or the mesosystem, Sharlyn was able to overcome the abuse she endured as a child, without family or community support. Bermudez and Mancini (2013) found it challenging to separate the individual systems because they are closely linked to culture, family, and community supports. Family resilience, or the exosystem within the framework, is where the construct of the Latino family coheres, with the expectation that one's life will revolve around the family unit (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). Specifically, the three participants had constructed their families cohesively, with their lives revolving around what was best for the family unit. Finally, there was a shared community resilience, or macrosystem, indicating the importance of having a community, a social network such as extended family members, or a church. Aide and Liz discussed seeking community supports. Aide used the university's social media sites to resolve the lack of resources available to her son and also exhibited school involvement with the value of a college education. Liz demonstrated community resilience by contacting her local community college to help with her son's depression.

Familism

Bermudez and Mancini (2013) claimed that, among Latino families, the concept of familism, or family factors, is the most salient, asserting, "The concept of *familismo*/familism is a core value and belief in the centrality of family in the life of Latinos" (p. 218). Familism highlights the strength in, loyalty to, and interdependence of family. It also indicates the value of cooperation over competition. Similarly, with ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1986) reinforced the family as the principal context in which human development happens through five interdependent systems. As evidenced by the participants, the five systems function not as independent variables, but as interconnected systems dependent on one another.

Supported by the intersectionality of Bronfenbrenner's (1989) five systems, specifically within the chronosystem that deals with transitions over time, Aide's familial resiliency was apparent in her generational influences. The impact of her beliefs and values at the macro level are interconnected with the exosystem, including her experiences with work and education. The intersectionality of all systems becomes a safety net for the family, with a high value placed on the centrality of familism. In emphasizing the value of education for her children to attain professional careers in light of the absence of her own parents, Aide has a vested interest in the education of her four children. Bermudez and Mancini (2013) claimed that growing up with traditional Mexican values, such as familism, contributed to resiliency. Family involvement, strong kin networks, and family supports are important resilience factors (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). In all, the study's findings substantiate the family support system as a resilience factor.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity was an important theme for all participants. Gonzalez et al. (2005) noted the concept of culture is significant when applied to diverse populations, such as Latinos. For instance, Liz enjoys her bilingual community, which has a mix of American and Mexican cultures. Living 10 minutes from the Mexican border, she has access to Mexican markets, and her children's schools accommodate her native language in school meetings and training.

Similarly, Aide clarified the importance of *respeto*, or respect, in relation to cultural identity. She shared what values were important: "Respect, humility, responsibility. Really, a lot of respect." The significance for Aide to convey respect to her family is set in her expectations, highlighting the cohesive family unit. Valdez (1996) identified the relationship between a mother and her children as extending beyond the English term of respect; rather, it is the most significant interaction between individuals and their families. The cultural identity these mothers voiced also

appeared in prior qualitative narrative research. Aide embraced both cultures, with her cultural identity at the core: being bilingual and bicultural, Mexican and Mexican-American. The framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory supported the complexity of interconnectedness of the different systems sustaining the cultural benefits of the participants, affecting the capacity of families to foster the healthy development of their children.

In the educational arena, the concept of culture for poor and minoritized students appeared to be the cause of educational failure (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Researchers have written about Latino culture as a source of strength, positive influence, and deep knowledge. This study echoes those findings. Cultural identity was a foundation for strength and courage among these mothers. Identity is not a cultural deficit, but a holistic configuration of traits and values that serve as protective shields for members of their families against individuals who view minority culture as a deficit (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Immigration and Transnationalism

Research Question 3 was specific to how gender, race, SES, and familial immigration shape how the mother influences her children's education. Results indicated that gender and race were not salient factors in this study. Rather, the intersectionality of the immigration experience with a focus on transnationalism and its impact on SES and upward economic mobility was the most significant finding related to this research question. The individual immigration experiences and transnationalism, or living on both sides of the border, had a significant impact on them individually, influencing and shaping how they parent.

Latinos are the most numerous and rapidly growing population in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Telles and Ortiz (2008) found that no other ethnic population in the United States besides Mexicans had the same relationship with its origin country in close

proximity to the mother country. The immigrant generational influence emerged in this study, highlighting the connection of the ecological systems theory chronosystem to the collected data. Proximity to the United States-Mexico border facilitates the opportunity for a transnational lifestyle: Families can live in both countries at the same time or at different times, or live in one country while working in the other. This is a very different immigration experience than many, one that was common among the study participants.

Liz's parents entered the United States to work "from before the sun came out until it set again." As a result, schooling was not a priority. The participants' humble beginnings are tightly interwoven with their immigration experiences and aligned with the families' SES. The mothers' modest entry into the United States heavily influenced how they value and support education as a vehicle to upward economic mobility.

Regardless of immigrant status as newly arrived or native-born, adaptation experiences have economic consequences and are dependent on academic success. There is a circular relationship between adaptation experiences and academic success. Upward social mobility is highly dependent on educational attainment and academic success. Alba (2006) argued that a fraction of Mexican-Americans are pursuing the American Dream; however, due to humble beginnings, such as those of the participants, a significant number of immigrant Mexicans will not achieve social mobility due to lack of educational and socioeconomic opportunities.

All three Mexican-American participants discussed lived on both sides of the border, having transnational experiences. Their immigration experiences were not linear, meaning they did not grow up in the United States, where they were born. Sánchez and Machado-Casas (2008) identified transnationalism as a social process, where immigrants are either students or have one or more parents, or the family as a whole, remaining in the mother country. These experiences

contradict research on immigrant optimism. Due to their transnational experiences and cultural identities, the women in this study transferred their optimism to their children. Third-generation optimism with transnational generational influences makes a difference in the lives of their children.

The participants shared how closely aligned their SES was to their immigration and transnational journey, which directly tied to the chronosystem's influence. Sharlyn's parents lived in Tijuana and crossed daily for work, their transnationalism necessitated by economic status. Aide's grandfather, a Mexican citizen, also worked as an undocumented farmworker, picking lemons in the United States until becoming a U.S. citizen and receiving amnesty. Her grandfather and grandmother spent their lives on both sides of the border, living in Mexico but working in the United States. This dynamic created the intersectionality of economic implications, meaning it was too expensive to live in the United States, forcing families to live in Mexico. Moreover, these generational influences sustained the transnational way of life for successive generations, such as the participants in this study. Although Aide and Sharlyn were U.S. citizens, because they lived in Mexico, their immigration was not in a traditional linear fashion compared to earlier European immigrants. Members of the latter group were able to achieve social and upward economic mobility for themselves and successive generations.

The mothers' experiences with transnationalism did not support a linear pattern of acculturation, academic achievement, and resultant economic success. The mothers were unable to obtain schooling success because of the demands placed on the family due to a transnational life. The participants now use their parental influence over their third- and fourth-generation children to ensure they attain higher educational levels. They made life choices based on the desire to live and work in the United States.

Sharlyn attended U.S. kindergarten, returned to Mexico, and then entered sixth grade in the United States. She continued to go back every weekend, however, as her parents' home was in Mexico. This transnationalism, connected to the chronosystem within the framework, has a deeper meaning. The chronosystem frames all of the family's dynamics within a historical context (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1989) strongly suggested that families respond to different stressors, such as lack of resources and the instability of the immigration trajectory. Sánchez and Machado-Casas (2008) viewed transnationalism as a precursor to educational achievement. Moving back and forth across the border can interrupt a child's education, which was the case for each of the mothers in this study. They did not lead static lives or assume a linear path of immigration: enroll in U.S. schools, learn English, and assimilate. On the contrary, a continued, transnational social space, regardless of physical borders, made it nonlinear, which included travel between two worlds connected to the mothers' experiences. Although the mothers were unable to find the stability needed for educational achievement, they grew into adulthood with the best of both worlds.

Socioeconomic Status

By 2050, Latino youth of the second, third, and successive generations will have an even greater presence in the United States, with their economic status primarily determined by the success or failure of the U.S. educational system in meeting the needs of children and their families (Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Portes et al., 2009, 2011, 2014; Suro & Passel, 2003). Liz attributed the focus on her children's education to her dearth of opportunities as a youth. Her family lacked financial stability and a focus on education because of the need to work. Liz reported that her father had to work two shifts while her mother got a job to bring in a second income. She discussed the first-generation immigrant experience of entering the United States at

the lowest economic status: "For [my grandparents], their childhood consisted of living in poverty. …When they had their children, they had to choose between studying and eating. They chose to eat."

The chronosystem's economic implications were evident with Liz. Her grandparents lived in poverty in Mexico. Her father came to work in the United States as an unauthorized farmworker, as did her mother. The transnational experience did not afford Liz the full opportunities of an education in the United States, thus precluding upward economic mobility.

Barriers hinder upward mobility within the first or second generation, making educational attainment difficult. According to a survey by Taylor et al. (2009), 74% of Latinos who had a high school diploma or less and who were not continuing their education claimed they needed to work to help support their family. In addition, 49% mentioned their English was limited and 40% said they could not afford to go to school. The demands of a global society will require more than a high school education for Latino immigrants and successive generations to compete and overcome socioeconomic barriers. The participants in this study acknowledged this reality, working to secure optimistic trajectories for their children.

All of the participants had children attending Title I schools; accordingly, it is important to acknowledge that students attending racially segregated schools are often poor. Frequently, the staff in such schools are ill-equipped to serve children living in poverty. Attending racial/ethnic minority schools and living in poverty may negatively affect Latino children's school attainment by limiting social capital and instructional resources (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Ryabov & Van Hook, 2007). Although race was not a salient factor, research has shown that racialization and the lack of mobility related to poor quality schools reinforce Mexican-Americans' low status in American society (Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

The SES of the participants was a notable factor in how they navigated the school system. The mothers took an active role in their school communities to learn the U.S. educational system. Participants were highly aware that upward mobility in the United States means attaining academic success by graduating from college and entering a profession. Without a college education, economic consequences can be significant especially if Mexican-American second-generation individuals living in households where the head of household do not acquire have a college degree.

Conclusion

The mothers in this study mitigated their own immigration experience and SES to develop their home life and parenting practices. The immigration experience aligns strongly with the generational influences of the first generation, along with their transnational experiences. Their transnational statuses did not afford these women the full opportunities of an education in the United States; hence, no upward economic mobility had occurred. The participants demonstrated deep resiliency in all facets of their lives. From early childhood experiences, adolescent challenges, and trauma to hard work as adults, the women remained resilient in their goals for their children and exhibited a strong sense of cultural identity and familism.

The framework used for this study supported the complexity of interconnectedness of the different systems sustaining the cultural benefits of the participants. Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) ecological systems theory provided a theoretical perspective to understanding families through a systematic method, focusing on the developing child and the interactions within the environment. The ecological environment is an approach to understanding families within the cultural and social context, interconnecting all systems within the framework. Within the cultural and social context, economic challenges necessitated back-and-forth, across-the-border living structures,

creating family structures that do not reflect the American nuclear family. These women learned resourcefulness to cope when funds were lacking. The women have a deeply embedded value of education due to their own lack of opportunity. The mothers understand how aspirations, high expectations, and a college education can provide for their third- and fourth-generation children, with social and economic upward mobility reinforcing the American Dream.

Implications

Based on the data presented in the study, there are implications for the educational arena. Schools, districts, counties, and academic programs must be able to meet the needs of a diverse population, such as Mexican-Americans, regardless of generation. In this section, implications address practices to consider as possible future effects on this population of Mexican-American children of the successive third and fourth generations. Overall, the implications indicate a need for sensitivity and a humanistic approach when working with a diverse population of Mexican-American children in U.S. K-12 institutions.

Implications for Theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was in a continual state of development until his death in 2005 (Tudge et al., 2006). As a self-reflective theorist, Bronfenbrenner found it important to distinguish between two periods of his theory. His first publication, *Ecology of Human Development* (1979), gave context to the first four systems: micro, meso, exo, and macro. He revised the processes of human development in 1989 and again in 1999 to allow for a fifth system (Tudge et al., 2006). The implication for theory is that the later, more-developed theory of 1999 could have used further development in the intersection of gender and race using Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time model. Gender and race were not salient factors as proposed by the social-ecological system theory of 1989. Bronfenbrenner acknowledged the

biological and genetic aspects of the individual; thus, the later and more-developed theory dealing with the interrelations of process-person-context-time may have allowed gender and race to surface. If the 1999 model had guided this study, gender and race might have been salient factors; however, this was not the case with the 1989 ecological systems theory framework.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice are great to create systems of support for children who live transnational lives. As a lead practitioner and director for Migrant Education for the state of California, I work with the entire southern portion of the state. The implications for the movement of children are enormous. Transnationalism will continue, where children and families occupy both spaces, physically and socially, on either side of the U.S.-Mexico border. These families move back and forth on a seasonal rotation. U.S. schools must employ personnel who will embrace Mexican-Americans' assets, cultural wealth, and identity. Professional development in the area of second language acquisition, ELL strategies, and English language development would support and scaffold learning supports with curricular progressions, supporting the families, particularly mothers. Mothers have a significant impact and influence over the educational successes of their children. They proudly instill deep convictions of the value of education to provide their children with future upward mobility. Students too often attended schools in which few have benefited from the advantages and power that middle-class families possess and exercise on behalf of their children. As a result, lower-SES children are ill-equipped for a society in which colleges/universities and good jobs are strongly White, middle-class institutions (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Orfield et al., 2016; Portes et al., 2011).

Implications for Further Research

This study achieved its purpose, but it is limited in scope. Findings naturally lead to additional research questions. First, detailing all six individual stories would provide further insight into Mexican-American mothers, their beliefs about education, and their child-rearing practices. All the mothers in this study had much to contribute. I would like to explore some of the differences that emerged, such as parental abandonment, mental health issues in low-income Latino homes, and Latina teenage pregnancy, along with Latino teenage incarceration and its future implications. Further, due to transnationalism emerging as a factor in the discussion, researchers could conduct a comparative mixed-methods study to examine the effects of transnationalism across the southern border of California. Such an inquiry would allow for quantitative measures of the mothers' impact.

This study involved individuals; therefore, the results are meaningful but not generalizable. Future researchers could adopt a different approach focused on generalizability. For example, scholars could replicate the study with similar populations using a larger sample size, stretching further along the border between the United States and Mexico. Another possibility is a comparative quantitative study to examine the effects of educational attainment due to transnationalism on both sides of the border. Finally, a researcher could conduct a longitudinal, mixed-methods study using a resilient framework to examine transnationalism on similar demographics, specifically to understand the multifaceted context and not an Anglo-centered view.

Implications for Leadership

Similar to the implications of practice, it is crucial to have a greater understanding of the intersectionality of immigrant status, SES, and the resiliency of Latinos—more specifically,

Mexican-Americans. These interrelated forces do not move in isolation or function in silos. The stories of Mexican-American families may vary by immigrant status or geographic location, yet with similar aspirations, high expectations, pride, and respect. As leaders, it is important to develop equitable systems and structures within an organization where children and their families are the priority. Advocacy is imperative at all levels of leadership, with families and their primary language valued as assets for supporting, encouraging, and modeling a social justice lens, always with *respeto.* Valdez (1996) found respect aligned with cultural identity and famililsm, something evident in the unified experiences of all participants of this study. Valdez asserted that the mother-child relationship goes beyond the English term of respect. Within the resilient Mexican-American mothers in this study, respect is the foundation and the most important interaction between individuals and families. The mothers embraced both Mexican and American cultures, evidencing a strong cultural identity through resilience, bilingualism, biculturalism, and pride in being Mexican-Americans. As leaders, regardless of any educational arena in the K-16 educational system, it is imperative to know the strength, courage, and resiliency behind Mexican-American students occupying their space in U.S. classrooms.

There are many related implications for practice and leadership. In my current role as Senior Director of Migrant Education for San Diego and Orange Counties, I serve over 4,000 students and their families who, like my participants, are transnational. The implications are many, but I want to highlight the following. I am on a transnational task force with binational stakeholders, including the *Secretaria de Baja California,* in conjunction with the San Diego County Office of Education, collaborating and addressing issues of transnational trends in the community. For instance, 54,000 U.S. students in the Baja California educational system struggle to work with the many students who do not speak the Spanish language. Tied to my dissertation,

I am developing equitable systems of support, creating a binational high school accredited in both countries.

Limitations

A limitation of this qualitative narrative study is the small sample size. Addressing this limitation would be possible with a larger group of Mexican-American mothers, using a mixed-methods study with quantitative data such as state test scores within the areas of the study. The geographic area in which the study took place was also limited by location.

Summary

This study helped illuminate how second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers influence, define, and shape their children's educational attainment. The theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory supported and assisted in the conceptualization of the familial context for Mexican-Americans living in southern California along the Mexican border.

This study makes a unique contribution to the qualitative research, having become a personal pilgrimage and an attempt to hear the previously unheard voices of the ordinary women who allowed me to enter into their lives and the lives of their families. The mothers exhibited a multifaceted prism of cultural identity combined with strength, courage, and extreme resilience, with the self-identification of Mexican-Americans, or *Mexicanas*. I could have easily been one of these mothers of students in Title I schools. During the interviews, I saw reflections of myself in their stories, *en los cuentos de familia*. When they cried, I, too, cried at times. It was hard to disconnect myself from the researcher. I felt like I was one of them.

This study strongly suggests that educators and leaders of organizations, no matter how big or small, understand Latinos—specifically Mexican-Americans, who are the largest Latino

subgroup in the United States; thus, the findings become an urgent call to action. The low SES of Mexicans and Mexican Americans perpetuates poverty, reinforcing the need for equitable educational opportunities and supporting students at all levels to reach their highest potential, achieving upward social mobility and breaking the cycles of poverty.

This study served to humanize the educational trajectory of the Mexican-American family by generational status, with a unique lens on the mother's influence on her child's educational attainment. The mothers took full responsibility, influencing their children's future economic opportunity to mobilize into the middle-class, which rests on the students' academic success and trajectory. Understanding the complexities, roles, and interactions narrated by the second- and third-generation Mexican-American mothers offers insight into the children's educational attainment as third- and fourth-generation U.S. residents.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS #1

Identity – Self and Child(ren)

1. How would you describe yourself as a person? In terms of race/ethnicity? (meso)
2. How many languages do you speak? Which language do you prefer to use?
3. Do you describe yourself as second- or third-generation?
4. How would you describe your child(ren) as a person? In terms of race/ethnicity? (micro)
5. How many languages does your child(ren) speak? Which language do they (he/she) prefer to use?
6. Do you describe your child as third- or fourth-generation?
7. Tell me about your family growing up. How would you describe growing up?

Personal – Schooling and Education Experience

8. Tell me about your experience in school.
9. Tell me about the influence your parents had on your education.
10. How did your parents play a role in the type of schooling that you received?
11. Describe the type of support your parents provided you as a child and in relation to school.
12. How was your family involved in your schooling when you were young?
13. Did you have extended family members? If so, did they play a role in your life as you were growing up?

Child(ren)'s Schooling and Education Experience

14. What do you want your son or daughter to get out of school? What do you hope for them to do with their education?
15. What is your understanding of your children's schooling experience? How does it compare to yours?

16. What do you wonder about for your child's education and what would you like to know?
17. Do you believe you are involved in your child's education? Describe your involvement with your child's education.
18. Are you involved with your child's education at school and/or at home? What does your involvement look like at school? What does your involvement look like at home?
19. Do you believe your child believes education is important? How involved do you believe your child is in his/her education?
20. What does your child's involvement look like at school? What does your child's involvement look like at home?

Social/Economic Environment

21. Now, as an adult, tell me about who is living here with you. Tell me about what role each family member has, if any.
22. Tell me about your experience living in your community. Tell me about your experience living in your community for your child(ren).
    - What do you like about it about it? What do you not like about it?
23. In your current living condition, does it have influence on your child's schooling? If so, how? For example, do you feel they have more opportunities or fewer opportunities?
24. What values have been instilled in you and you are passing down to your children, if any?
25. Describe your family structure when you were young. How is your family structure now with your own kids?
26. Tell me about the immigration experience of the first generation when they first came from the homeland. What was that experience like for your parents or grandparents?

27. How are your parents' or grandparents' experiences different from yours, if any, living in the United States?
28. Do you believe you have had more or less opportunities? Please explain.
29. What transitions or changes over time have you or your family gone through, if any, since the first generation immigrated to the United States? Please explain.

Thank you.

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