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Chicanas in Higher Education: The Role of Family, Socialization Practices, and Mentors

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Looking back on my experiences as an undergraduate student more than a decade ago, I can still remember the excitement I felt as I walked into my first Chicano Studies class: La Chicana. The local community college that I attended the first two years did not offer any Chicano Studies courses, and it wasn't until I transferred to the University of California, that I finally came into contact with a few Latino professors and a Chicano Studies curriculum. After completing this course, to say that my life changed is an understatement. The Chicana professor who taught "La Chicana," took me under her wing, and we soon developed a wonderful teacher-student relationship that affected me profoundly. For the first time in my academic life, I felt a sense of belonging in a university setting. Soon after that I changed my major from Liberal Studies to Sociology and decided to attend graduate school. My other source of inspiration and support was my family, especially my mother. Being a single mother with three small children presented numerous challenges for me, but having my family close by contributed greatly to my academic success.

Today, in my more retrospective moments, I often wonder what would have happened had I not been fortunate enough to have these wonderful people in my life. My interest in Chicanas in higher education stems from my own educational experiences and an interest in examining why some of my own Chicana/Latina students persist and graduate, while others leave the university without a diploma.

This study examines the effects of protective resources and compensatory factors such as parental support and encouragement, socialization practices, mentors, and personal characteristics on Chicana graduation rates from a four-year state university. Generally, Chicanas/Latinas who attend college share similar academic risk factors such as poverty, tracking, lower academic expectations, inferior instruction, and attending segregated schools. But why do some

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Chicanas/Latinas overcome these barriers and realize successful completion of a Bachelor's degree while others do not? It is proposed that Chicanas who successfully graduate with a college degree are likely to have the following features. First, they had supportive parents who socialized them to value education, to be self-reliant and goal oriented. Second, they had mentors and other sources of support which helped them attain their academic goals. And third, they integrated their parent's teachings on the importance of perseverance, motivation, and self-determination into their "stocks of knowledge." These types of nontraditional factors are viewed as insulators that counterbalance or offset the effects of an academically at-risk status. To provide a context for this analysis, I first discuss the relevance of this type of research. Second, I examine the various explanations for Latina/o academic failure and success. Third, I give a brief demographic overview of Latinos in higher education. Fourth, I draw on semi-structured interviews to examine how protective resources and compensatory factors enable Chicana students to graduate successfully from college. I conclude with recommendations for the development of a Latino educational attainment agenda and a new perspective that includes nontraditional factors that act as protective and compensatory resources used by Chicanas to overcome an at-risk status.

This research is important for several reasons. First, the U.S. population is undergoing major demographic shifts directly related to demographic changes in Latino population. In 1990, the Latino population stood at 22.4 million, a 53 percent increase since 1980. The Mexican-origin population grew from 4.5 million in 1970 to 8.7 million in 1980, an increase of 93 percent. By 1990, there were nearly 13.5 million Mexican-origin people in the country (Habra, 1994). The numerical increase in Chicanos will be felt most in the Southwest, where slightly more than 80 percent of the Chicano population resides (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). We need to keep the rapid growth of the Chicano/Latino population in consideration when interpreting the social and public policy issues surrounding educational concerns among Chicanos/Latinos.

A second reason to study the interstices of higher education and Chicanos/Latinos derives from the people's low socioeconomic

status. Three socioeconomic indicators, high rates of poverty, lower family income, and greater numbers of people per household, have an adverse effect on the "quality of life" for Latino families, mitigating against further increases in Latino college participation/graduation rates. For example, de los Santos and Rigual (1994) note that in 1991 about 27 percent of all Latino families earned incomes below the poverty line, compared to less than 10 percent of all non-Latino families. With respect to family income, Jackson (1999) notes that in California, the 1998 median wage for Latinos was $14,560 and $27,000 for Whites. Finally, 15 percent of all Latino households in 1990 had six or more people, compared to 3.4 percent for non-Latino households; and the median family income for Latino families was $23,900, compared to $37,000 for non-Latino families. Clearly, these three socioeconomic characteristics delineate the importance of making Latino educational attainment and completion a social policy priority.

Third, Latinos are expected to become the largest minority population in California by 2025. From an economic standpoint, it makes sense to identify factors that enable Chicanos/Latinos to graduate from college because they represent a potentially huge source of tax revenues for state governments. Fourth, not as much is known about the factors that promote persistence and college completion in Hispanic students as is known of their enrollment patterns (de los Santos & Rigual, 1994). For example, we know that total enrollment of Latinos in postsecondary educational institutions is expected to increase from approximately 13.9 million in 1990 to 15.7 million by 2000 (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). More elusive is the fact that more Chicano/Latino students enroll in institutions of higher learning than earn degrees. Aguirre and Martinez (1993) attribute attrition to the effects of political and legal attacks on minority financial aid, a widespread economic recession, and rising tuition costs. However, in addition to structural factors, we need more studies that examine systematically what happens to Chicano/Latino students once they are accepted into a four-year institution, and what nontraditional factors account for whether or not they graduate.

Fourth, Gándara (1995) notes:

". . . [T]here is a large body of literature pointing to several

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ways in which parents and families affect educational outcomes for their children . . . nonetheless, the research is occasionally contradictory, but most often silent, on the issue of how ethnic minority parents, and Chicano parents in particular, can and do impact their children's schooling (29-39).

Subsequently, this study will add to the literature on the effects of family/parental support and socialization practices on Latino educational achievement.

Finally, studies of Chicanos/Latinos in higher education are timely because voters and social policy makers in California and other Southwestern states have moved away from addressing equity issues, which subsequently affects Chicano/Latinos' access to higher education. For example, in 1994, voters in California approved Proposition 187, which eliminated almost all public services for undocumented immigrants. Although Governor Gray Davis just recently rejected Proposition 187 because the initiative was unconstitutional, the same group that put the initiative on the ballot has reorganized and is again securing signatures to place a similar proposition in the November 2000, California ballot. Moreover, in November of 1996, California residents voted for the California Civil Rights Initiative (Proposition 209), which dismantled Affirmative Action. In 1998, California voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 227, which severely limited bilingual education. Proponents of Proposition 227 have also organized in Arizona and other Southwestern states in an effort to pass a similar initiative. There is no doubt that if these anti-equity social policy trends continue in California and elsewhere, Chicano/Latino educational access is at-risk. It is imperative that scholars interested in increasing Latino access to education continue to monitor social policy and engage in research that counters exclusionary policies. By expanding what we already know about Latino educational attainment and access it is possible to refute social policy that is often based on irrational fear that Latinos are "taking over." I will now focus on what we do know about Latinos in the schooling process.

Explanations for Latino Educational Attainment and Access

Social-conflict analyses of Latino/minority educational attainment and access in the United States includes factors such as race/ethnicity, class, segregation, discrimination, racism, tracking, sociopolitical, and historical processes (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Collins, 1979; Epps, 1995; Gamoran, 1992; Kozol, 1992; Rendon, et al., 1996; Valencia, 1991). This perspective links formal education and social inequality and describes how schools routinely provide learning according to students' social background, thereby perpetuating social inequality. Valencia (1991) cites various problems encountered by Chicana/o students in public schools that account for their limited school success. Problems mentioned include: (1) an increase in racial/ethnic segregation, (2) exclusion of language and culture from the school curriculum, (3) disproportionately lower performance on achievement tests, (4) high dropout rates, (5) underfinanced schools, (6) less favorable treatment by teachers, (7) tracking, (8) lower rates of college eligibility and enrollment to college, (9) high levels of stress and anxiety, and (10) low numbers of Chicano teachers. Valencia insightfully identifies key elements that account for Latino students' failure or success in the public school system and access to college. A major strength of his study is that he relies on a wide spectrum of structural influences to explain issues related to educational equity and access.

Aguirre and Martinez (1993) note that "isolation" plays a significant role in shaping the educational outcomes of Chicanos. Isolation refers to a process such as tracking and residential segregation that result in Chicanos being concentrated in remedial programs and low income minority schools, characterized by low levels of educational attainment. They point out that:

> The cumulative effect of educational isolation for Chicano students can be observed in the undereducation of the Chicano. In turn, from the point of view of social systems, the undereducation of the Chicano population serves to reinforce the subordinate position of the population within the country's opportunity structure (9).

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The study also includes a brief historical analysis of U.S. institutions, and the role of the Chicana/o student movement in making higher education more accessible to Chicanos and other Latinos. Additionally, it reinforces the idea that social change in education is possible, and that Chicanos are not passive by-standers, but rather are actively engaged in positive educational reforms.

With respect to the importance of mentors, research suggests that the retention of Chicano students in postsecondary institutions is associated with the availability of student support services that facilitate their adaptation to a relatively new and alien environment, among them tutorial and remedial learning programs, specialized academic counseling and orientation sessions, and social support systems (Chavez, 1986). Additionally, retaining Chicano students is also dependent on whether or not the university provides Chicano faculty who can serve as role models. Whether it is because students struggle to be like their mentors or because their mentors treat them with empathy and respect is not clear, but the mentoring role of minority faculty is critical (Aguirre & Martinez, 1995). A disturbing pattern reported in the Almanac of Higher Education (1997) is the decreasing pool of Chicano faculty, administrators, and counselors at the university level, which has not kept pace with the increasing proportion in the growth of the Chicano student population. For example, in 1992, White faculty members (87%) dominated the academic profession; in comparison to minority faculty who comprised 13 percent of the academic profession. Even more perplexing is the fact that Latinos represented only 3 percent of the 13 percent minority academic professionals. The limited representation of Chicano faculty at four-year institutions is important because Chicano students in four-year institutions will have limited access to Chicano faculty as mentors (Verdugo, 1992). From a social-conflict perspective, the low number of Chicano/Latino mentors decreases the likelihood that Chicanos/Latinos will graduate from college.

Kozol (1992) examines the extremes of wealth and poverty across several states. He laments that he was not prepared for the remarkable degree of racial segregation, poverty, health problems, and slum-like conditions that persisted in schools with a high number of minority students. Kozol compares poor inner-city schools with wealthy ones

and concludes that the dramatic differences are attributed to race and class: the schools with the worst facilities, teachers, test scores, and resources are 95% minority (Latinos and African Americans). He describes the schools as places where little learning take place and where children are continually bombarded with messages that they do not matter much.

> My deepest impression, however, was less theoretical and more immediate. It was simply the impression that these urban schools were, by and large, extraordinarily unhappy places. With few exceptions, they reminded my of "garrisons" or "outposts" in a foreign nation. Housing projects, bleak and tall, surrounded by perimeter walls lined with barbed wire, often stood adjacent to the schools I visited. The windows of the schools were often covered with steel grates. Taxi drivers flatly refused to take me to some of these schools and would deposit me a dozen blocks away, in border areas beyond which they refused to go (4-5)

The end result, argues Kozol, is that schooling gives minorities "minimal skills" which translates into "minimal existence." Kozol's powerful study documents the existence of a dual-educational system and the impact racism and classism on access to post-secondary education for minority students.

In summary, social-conflict perspectives suggest that social inequality in the schooling process is reproduced and perpetuated via institutionalized race and class systems. Latinos and other minorities are not as likely as Whites to attend college and/or graduate with a four year degree due to structural barriers. These perspectives, however, don't account for why it is some Latino students graduate from college despite the obstacles. The social-conflict model fails to include the effects of individual characteristics, familial, and cultural factors on academic success or failure. Additionally, this perspective does not inform us how these elements act as protective and/or compensatory resources.

In contrast to social-conflict approaches which focus on structural factors that influence academic success or failure, other studies

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suggest that, among Chicano/Latino students, family and community support systems, specific types of socialization practices, individual attributes, high levels of motivation, and access to mentors are good predictors of educational attainment within the group (Astin and Burciaga 1981, Arellano and Padilla 1996, Chacon et al. 1986, Cortese 1992, Del Castillo et al. 1988ab, Gándara 1995, Madrid 1988, McKenna & Ortiz 1988, Ortiz 1988, Vásquez 1982, Zambrana et al. 1997). For example, Zambrana, et al. (1997) compared Chicanas to white and African American women who had completed a four year college degree. They found that compared to White and African American women, Chicanas were more likely to have parents who were less educated, have lower educational expectations, less involved during grade school, and be of lower socioeconomic status. Considering these barriers, what explanation did they offer for these Chicana's successful completion of a four year college degree? They concluded that perceived family support played an important role in their success. As a matter of fact, Chicanas reported higher levels of family support (emotional, encouragement, and practical assistance) than White or African American women. By relying on a comparative method, this study provides us with significant data on the relationship between educational achievement and class, cultural, and racial/ethnic differences and similarities among three major female groups in society. These crucial insights are certainly important for social policy makers and social scientists who may not be aware that women of color have different educational needs than White women, or that what works for one group may not work for another group.

Gándara (1995) interviewed fifty Chicanas who successfully completed graduate and/or professional school. She identified several nontraditional factors associated with the students' successful attainment of a graduate/professional degree. First, family stories of lost fortunes and of eminent ancestors/extended family members, conveyed primarily by mothers were found to provide the subjects with a sense of hope that they too could overcome their current circumstances. In essence, the family stories told by these mothers provided their children with role models, "self-belief of efficacy," and cultural capital. Second, Chicana respondents reported that although both parents were supportive of educational goals, mothers were the guid-

ing force behind their powerful educational ambitions. A third factor cited by both males and females, was persistence and hard work, not innate ability. And finally, the majority of Chicanas said that mentors—minority faculty/program directors—played a significant role in encouraging and helping them to continue their postgraduate education. Gándara concludes that:

> In spite of serious economic disadvantages, most of these subjects' parents were doing precisely the kinds of things that the literature reports are important for instilling achievement motivation in children, but which are generally believed to be restricted to the middle class. For the most part, they (especially the mothers) were very supportive of their children's educational goals, set high performance standards, modeled and encouraged literacy, and helped with schoolwork in any way they could (111).

Studies such as this one go beyond the usual deficiency and social-conflict explanations offered for Latino educational achievement. Gándara's work shows the complexities involved in the educational attainment of Chicanas and Chicanos. The influence of the family—especially the mother—family stories, and socialization practices indicates that familism and culture are positive mechanisms that promotes opportunities for academic success.

Chacon, et al. (1986) investigated the effects of academic and other support services on Chicano students' academic progress in college. They found that although both sexes reported high parental support, men were significantly more likely to say that their parents were "very supportive." Other factors found to be negatively associated with Chicanas' academic progress were stress, unpaid domestic work, and non-utilization of formal support services such as women's centers and re-entry programs. This landmark study provides extensive data on Chicana and Chicanos in higher education and included both traditional and nontraditional factors.

Arellano and Padilla (1996) examined personal and environmental influences that contributed to Latino students' academic success. Personal resources consisted of individual attributes such as

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personality characteristics, attitude, and motivation whereas, environmental factors referred to external support systems found in the family, school, and community (486). Interviews with 30 undergraduate Latinos students attending a highly selective university revealed Latino students who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds who fit the pattern of "at risk," were nonetheless academically successful. Three major environmental factors cited by respondents as influencing their academic achievement were: (1) parent's support (moral, spiritual, and emotional), (2) participation in Latino community service organizations and socialization with other Latinos, and (3) role models and mentors who advised, guided and mediated the college entrance process.

Personal resources included the development of a success-enabling outlook early in life; enrollment in an advanced program (GATE- Gifted and Talented Education) which influenced goal orientation, high self-esteem and self-efficacy; and persistence/drive to succeed. The researchers also found that there were differences between higher socioeconomic and working class Latino students. Students from middle class families followed a more mainstream route in their academic attainment, and reported that their parent's cultural capital, rather than their personal features or environmental factors as reported by working class students, enabled them to be successful in an ivy league university. The results of this study provide insights about class differences and the heterogeneity that exists among Latino students, and the interplay between socio-cultural, personal, and environmental factors that act as positive influences.

Three additional studies that have made significant contributions to Chicanas/Latinas in higher education are studies by Vasquez (1982), (Del Castillo et al. 1988a and 1988b, Segura 1993). Vasquez' (1982) study of Chicanas in higher education suggests that barriers such as sex-role restrictions, low socioeconomic status, alienation and isolation, and traditional admissions criteria such as test scores and high school achievement prevent Chicanas from participating in postsecondary education. However, these barriers were found to be mediated by factors such as support and encouragement from teachers, significant others, and parents (especially mother's encouragement). (Del Castillo et al. 1988a and 1988b) examined familial factors related to higher education achievement among Latina women. They concluded that factors such as parental education expectations, involvement during grade school, and encouragement and support (emotional and financial) had a positive effect on higher education achievement. Segura's study (1993) focused on factors that influenced the schooling experience of lower- and working-class Chicanas. Relying on experiential data, she shows how social-class origin and gender-specific expectations within the family restrict educational attainment.

> The educational and familial experiences examined here reveal the multidimensional nature of the impediments faced by the respondents as they struggled to become educated and force us to reevaluate the stereotypical explanations for low Chicano educational achievement. Though conventional wisdom perceives Chicano/Mexican families as having low regard for education, the parents of the Chicana respondents repeatedly encouraged them to do well in school. Few parents, however, actually intervened in the schooling process. Far from being simply a racial or ethnic matter, this reluctance conforms to a more general working-class pattern of leaving educational concerns to educational professionals, as observed in a study by Lareau, 1984 (212).

Segura's study also examined the effects of tracking and lack of encouragement on educational achievement. She found that teachers and counselors routinely channeled Chicanas into nonacademic tracks which tended to offer a lower quality of instruction. Moreover, neither teachers nor counselors encouraged Chicana students to pursue college or professional careers. According to Segura "diffident instruction, lack of teacher caring, and inadequate counseling constrained the educational chances of the respondents" (p. 212). Segura's study offers significant insights regarding the barriers faced by Chicanas in the schooling process. Additionally, she includes strategies that appeared to improve the quality of education Chicanas receive. Segura found that when students had teachers who cared, had high expectations, and gave constant reinforcement and encouragement, the stu-

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dents were motivated to do well in the classroom.

In summary, studies based on a social-conflict perspective focus on structural variables that affect educational achievement and/or access. They provide evidence that Latino and other minority students are more than likely than non-minority students to attend predominantly segregated schools, receive inferior instruction, and are subjected to institutional and social racism and discrimination. In contrast, other research contends that structural barriers to educational attainment and access are ameliorated by protective resources and compensatory factors such as familial, cultural, individual characteristics, and external support systems. It is important that we understand the connection between the transmission of values and norms, parental influence during the early schooling process, mental well being, mentors, personality characteristics, and how these various components are subsequently utilized by Latino students as protective resources to overcome educational barriers. The conceptual framework for this study is based on the premise that although the students in this analysis fit the so called "at risk" profile, protective resources and compensatory factors have served as mediators for their successful academic achievement. In the next section I will give an overview of the status of Latinos in higher education, and provide a context for understanding why Latinos are considered "at risk" academically.

Profile of Latinas/os in Higher Education

In 1992, there were 519,000 Latino students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education, an increase of 84 percent over the 1982 figure of 519,000 (Carter and Wilson 1994). Also noteworthy is the fact that Latinas' participation rates in college have increased 1978 (24.8%) and 1992 (39.4%). Although, Latino men's participation has also increased, it has not been as dramatic (1978= 30% and 1992=34.4%). While these figures seem impressive, compared to other racial and ethnic populations, Chicanos have the lowest levels of college completion. According to Aguirre and Martinez (1993), data show that in 1990, 5.4 percent of the Chicano population had completed four or more years of college compared to 9.7 percent of Puerto Ricans, 11.4 percent of African Americans, and 20.2 percent of Cuban

Americans. The two groups with the highest college completion rates were Asians (39.9 percent), and Whites (28.5 percent). Additionally, only 4.5 percent of all bachelor's degrees awarded in the U.S. in 1991 went to Latinos (National Science Board 1993). These demographic trends lend support to the "at-risk" profile of Latino students in the United States.

The Setting

The study site is a California State University located in Southern California. The campus enrollment is approximately 9600 undergraduate students, with a 63 percent female student population, and a 37 percent male student population. The majority of students are commuters and the average age is 26. The student population is diverse: 45% White, 25% Latino, 7% Asian, 9% African American, 1 percent American Indian, and 13% other. In comparison, the faculty is predominantly White (77.3%t), compared to 7%Latino, 5.8% African American, 5.6% Asian Americans, .5% American Indians, and 3.9% other non-whites.

Methods and Procedures

The study focused primarily on the effects of protective resources and compensatory factors such as family support and encouragement, socialization practices, mentoring, role models, and persistence on Chicanas' academic achievement. Questions were based on relevant studies that identified key factors that influence academic achievement among Latino students (Aguirre & Martinez 1993, Cardoza 1991, Chacon et al. 1985, Galindo & Escamilla 1995, Gándara 1995, Olivas 1986, Ortiz 1988, Zambrana et al. 1997). Additionally, there is substantial research on familism and assimilation that suggests that the Chicano/Latino family, language and culture continue to play an important role as a buffer between the individual and the larger society (Bautista et al. 1992, Blea 1992, Hayes- Hurtado 1995, Hurtado et al. 1992, Mirande 1985, Valdez 1996, Valenzuela & Dornbusch 1996, Williams 1990). For example, my own research on Latino urban families (Valdez 1996) shows that low-income Mexican and Mexican Ameri-

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can single mothers use various familial strategies such as retaining the use of Spanish in the home, inculcating the importance of family and ethnic identity to their children, and maintaining family/community networks that serve as protective resources. Along the same vein, Hurtado et al. (1992) and Hayes-Bautista et al. (1992) collected survey data that shows that Latino families in contemporary society exhibit high levels of familism and a high regard for cultural retention as evidenced by Spanish language maintenance, and ethnic identity. And finally, Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1996) examined familism and assimilation among Mexican-origin high school adolescents. Their study shows that:

> . . . the conventional theoretical framework in the assimilationist literature lacks explanatory value in the area of educational achievement. Scholars in the assimilationist tradition have suggested that once Mexican-origin persons acculturate into the mainstream of society, they will shed their "traditional" orientations. Contrary to the view of some scholars, key aspects of Mexican culture, such as a sense of familism, survive the acculturation process (53).

Twenty Chicana students who had graduated from a Southern California state university during the 1996-1997 academic year were interviewed. The subjects were accessed through a purposive, network sampling approach, using the "snowballing" method described by Marin and Van Oss Marin (1991). The criteria for sample selection were: ethnicity, and completion of a B.A. or B.S. degree in Southern California. Potential participants were obtained through a variety of resources including personal networking professional and community organizations and ads in a local Chicano newspaper. All potential respondents were contacted by telephone and told the purpose of the study. All of the interviews were conducted in English and took an average of 1.5 to 2 hours to complete. Fifteen of the interviews took place at the university and five were conducted in the respondent's home. Only six students declined to be interviewed largely due to work and/or family commitments. All of the interviews were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed.

A semi-structured interview format which included questions on the respondent's background, and a follow-back, recollection method described by Gándara (1995) was used to gather data. Familial constructs included five items. First, subjects' perceptions of the importance of self reliance, independence, and the work ethic, placed by their mothers and fathers as they were growing up, were assessed by asking respondents to recall whether their parents valued each one and if they did, to give some examples. Second,respondents were asked to recollect examples of how their parents assisted them during their early schooling years. Third, to determine educational goal setting, participants were asked which parent or family member had the greatest influence on the development of their educational goals. Fourth, students were asked whether their mother and father valued and/or stressed the importance education as they were growing up. And the fifth familial construct consisted of asking subjects to describe psychological/emotional support received by parents and/or significant others. Mentor-related constructs included questions on who provided the respondents with information on financial assistance, scholarships, and advising/mentoring while attending college. The Individual-Personal Characteristics construct asked subjects to describe some personal characteristics that were instrumental in helping them graduate from college.

Gándara cites both "dangers and limitations in using a retrospective method: memory, error, guilt, social norms, and level of interest in the subject matter can all affect the accuracy of respondents' reporting of data" (20). However, there is considerable evidence that the reporting of general attitudes and factual information is relatively stable over time (Gutek 1978, Haaga 1986, cited in Gándara 1995). Moreover, while some error may occur in recall, it is substantially minimized by asking questions about (1) general conditions and impressions over time rather than perceptions of single events, (2) the personal characteristics of the subjects, and (3) the background traits of the researcher. In applying this criteria to my study, the respondents were asked questions about general conditions and impressions of ongoing conditions in their home, community, and school; and therefore, the reporting was less vulnerable to distortion over time. Second, the participants were highly interested and motivated to

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be part of the study, and they were bright and articulate. Level of interest in the study topic has been shown to be a good predictor of data accuracy (Menneer 1978, cited in Gándara 1995). Third, because the research suggests that more highly educated respondents are, indeed, more accurate in retrospective reporting respondents of the study, the comfort level made it easy for respondents to be candid and very open in their responses (Haaga 1986, cited in Gandara 1995).

In summary, the thoughts and memories of twenty Chicana students anchor this study. As eloquently noted by Barbara Myerhoff (1980) who conducted a study of the life histories of elderly Eastern European Jews living in California, who she refers to as memory bearers, "They [narrators] become active participants in their own history; they provide their own sharp, insistent definitions of themselves, their own explanations, for their past and their destiny" (22). This study will add to the scant literature on what really makes a difference in the lives of academically ambitious low-income Chicanas, who according to the "at-risk" literature should have dropped out a long time ago. These women speak to us, recalling the voices of childhood, adolescence, and womanhood. They inform us about adaptation, resilience, repression, and resistance.

Characteristics of the Sample

Of the twenty subjects, seven were single, nine were married, and four were divorced. Eight of the respondents ranged in age from 22 to 27, and twelve were 36 to 43 years old. Ten reported earning between $0 to $14,999 annually, eight earned $15,000 to $24,999, and two said they earned $25,000 to $35,000. Fifteen of the students said they were born in the U.S., and five were born in Mexico. The primary language of four of the respondents was English only, but sixteen said that they were fluent in both English and Spanish. Fifteen of the subjects reported that their parents were from working-class backgrounds, and five said they came from lower middle-class families. Thirteen of the students were Social Science majors, six were from the Humanities, and one was a Business and Communications major. Four of the respondents had already been accepted or were attending graduate school, and the other sixteen expressed an in-

terest in attending graduate school in the near future. All of the subjects expressed an appreciation for being asked to participate in the study. It should also be noted that some of the questions—especially those regarding early childhood and schooling experiences—elicited emotional responses from several of the students. On several occasions, I had to stop so that the student could compose herself.

Findings

Parental Support, Encouragement and Socialization Practices

Numerous studies document the powerful effect of parental influence on determining a Latino child's academic success or failure (Zambrana et al. 1997, Arellano & Padilla 1996, Gandara 1995, Vasquez 1992, Delgado-Gaitan 1991, Del Castillo et al. 1988a and 1988b, Chacon et al. 1986). Factors such as the nature of parent-child interactions, language and literacy events in the home, parental aspirations, parental involvement, and parental encouragement, are viewed as powerful determinants of academic performance and achievement. For example, Del Castillo et al. (1988b) document that:

> Studies indicate that among Latinas there exists a strong correlation between academic achievement and a mother's support and encouragement of educational endeavors. A mother's influence motivates educational drive and mediates the negative effects of barriers to educational achievement (46).

Gándara (1995) notes that " . . . there is a large body of literature pointing to several ways in which parents and families affect educational outcomes for their children: opportunities for independence and task mastery, high aspirations and standards, encouragement for schooling, creation of an intellectually stimulating environment, and involvement in schooling" (29). In sections A through E, I will be discussing the respondent's perceptions of her parent/family's role in: (a) teaching her the importance of self-reliance, being independent

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and the value of hard work, (b) helping her during the early years of schooling, (c) setting educational goals, (d) teaching her about the importance of education and, (e) giving nurturing and emotional support. I will also examine the effects of mentors and personality characteristics on the students' success in college. It is proposed that Latino parents' (especially mothers') familiarity with institutional barriers and discrimination evoke the need to nurture and socialize their children with skills and abilities to help them cope in the schooling process. Subsequently, students whose parents provide them with these "stocks of knowledge" are better equipped to successfully graduate from college.

A. Self Reliance, Independence, and the Work Ethic

One component of parental support was whether the participants were socialized to be self-reliant, independent, and to value the work ethic. Students who were taught these types of skills are thought to have the advantage of protective resources crucial for succeeding in school. Respondents were asked whether or not their parents valued these characteristics, and if so, in what ways did they instill or encourage them to embrace or adopt these behaviors. Most respondents recalled that when they were growing up their parents stressed the importance of self-sufficiency, independence, and the work ethic. For most of the subjects it wasn't a matter of choice. Their parents expected them to take on a lot of responsibility at a very young age. As one 23 year old Chicana described it:

> One of the characteristics that was most valued by my mother in her children was our ability to be independent and self - reliant. My mother believed you couldn't trust anyone outside the family. She taught us that it was very important for us to be independent but at the same time, to rely on the family when necessary. By the time I was twelve I was already washing dishes, cooking, and cleaning. We were expected to do things without being told.

Another 25 year old recalled:

> It was valued to the point where we could make it on our own, but not to the point where you didn't need your family. My parents encouraged us to get part-time jobs—mowing lawns, baby-sitting—so we could learn the value of money.

For these subjects, independence and hard work were closely related behaviors. Being independent meant being able to take care of oneself in the world. One of the subjects commented that her parents were the hardest working people she has ever known:

> My father took part-time jobs so his children would not lack in what they needed. In high school he made sure his kids had cars to get to school. He pushed and pushed us to have part-time jobs to get ahead. When I was twelve my mother became very ill after having a baby boy who later died. I had to take care of my sister who was two years old. I had to take care of the other children also. My father was in Alaska, he was not with us that year, so it was a very difficult year.

Two students recounted that although their parents did not encourage independence while they were growing up, they directly demonstrated the importance of work through their behavior. For example, a 27 year-old Chicana remembered that her parents did not encourage her to be independent or self-sufficient:

> . . . my father's attitude was that I couldn't think for myself. He wanted total compliance. But his actions showed me that he cared about me. He worked very hard to put me in a good school.

Another 42 year-old mother of four offered the following recollection of her mother's lack of encouragement to be independent, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of hard work:

> It was not valued (self-reliance and independence). My mother

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> was so possessive of her children. She was very domineering. Today, it is even hard for her to see herself letting go of her children and allowing us to have and make our own decisions, because she always wants to have input in our lives. It wasn't highly valued like it should have been. But the work ethic was very important. My parents stressed working hard, both verbally and through role modeling. We always had job tasks. If we wanted to go anywhere or do something, our had to be done first.

For most of the respondents—independence, taking care of oneself, and the work ethic— were components of their socialization. These parents, especially mothers, provided a critical protective resource necessary for their daughter's academic achievement by instilling responsibility and independent behavior, orally and/or through role modeling, perhaps in response to their awareness of the difficulties faced by minority women in society. Ironically, values such as a strong work ethic, independence, and self-sufficiency are typically associated with white middle-class families. These results challenge assimilationist notions that minority groups such as Latinos have not excelled academically because they have failed to embrace conventional values.

When parents support and encourage their children by structuring learning opportunities which emphasize independent behavior, self-sufficiency, and a strong work ethic, students have additional protective and compensatory resources they can draw from. In short, not only did these respondents strongly embrace the so-called "work ethic" from a very young age, they have also used this and other learned skills as stepping stones to navigate through the schooling process. Consequently, Latino students who come to college without these skills may be in need some of type of training in the form of orientation courses. For example, strategies to help students with time management, listening and note taking, comprehension of college texts, study planning, comprehension of test questions, improving test-taking ability, library and computer skills, and academic procedures could be integrated into the first year curriculum of college students.

B. Parental Assistance in Early Schooling

Students were asked to recall specific ways that their parents assisted them in early schooling. Many of them felt that parental support and encouragement in the form of parental assistance in early schooling played a role in their educational attainment. Some of the subjects remembered receiving assistance from either their mother, father, or both parents, while others credited their mother for providing them with various types of assistance—such as helping with homework or making sure they did their homework —when they were growing up. For example, one 42 year-old female remembered that ". . . my mother used to help me write my name when I was very little." Another 23 year-old respondent recalled that "My mother helped only in math, but she really couldn't help in English. She read to us in Spanish, especially the bible." One 27 year-old Chicana also recounted that her ". . . mother was hesitant to read to us in English. But she did teach me my numbers and ABC's." A 36 year-old married student who was raised in Mexico during her early childhood years credited both of her parent's economic sacrifices in assisting her during her early schooling years.

> My parents sacrificed a lot of money to send me to private school. It was very important for them that I attend private school because the public schools were very dangerous. It took a long time for my parents to save the tuition. They really couldn't afford to send me there, but they worked and saved a great deal. They had to take out bank loans to send me to school.

Although multiple factors influence parental involvement in the schooling of their children, including socioeconomic and language factors, and institutional barriers, policies and practices; several respondents cited lack of parent's English fluency as an obstacle to parental involvement. That is, their parents felt very intimidated when it came to interaction with their teachers and/or school staff. Data shows that most of the public school teachers are white, and as a result Latino parents with little or no English fluency are unable to commu-

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nicate with their children's teacher. For example, in 1993, 80.7% of the teachers in California were white, compared to 8.5% who were Latino (Unfinished Journal 1994). Nonetheless, although the parents in his study did not engage in extensive interaction with their children's teachers, they helped their daughters at home in meaningful way that benefited them academically years later.

C. Setting Educational Goals

Another form of parental support and encouragement that had a significant influence on the respondent's educational attainment was parents' influence in setting educational goals. Students were asked to discuss which of their parents had the greatest influence on the development of their educational goals during high school. Most of the respondents recalled that their mother had the most influence in helping them set their educational goals. A common example given for why setting educational goals was important was their mothers' unfulfilled dreams of achieving an education themselves.

> My mom only went to the third grade in Mexico. She got married at 17 and came to the U.S. when she was about 24. She vowed that her kids would go to college, no matter what it took. When we were growing up, she would always tell us how important it was to plan ahead and opened up a small savings account for all her kids. Every two weeks she would take us to the bank and we would watch her deposit a few dollars in our accounts. By the sixth grade, when anyone asked me "what do you want to be when you grow up," I would automatically say "I'm going to college." So you see, I partly went to college for myself, and partly because my Mother always dreamed of going to school, but never could.

One 42 year-old Chicana recalled that she received different types of help from both parents in setting her educational goals:

> My father was a man who was orphaned and pulled himself up by his bootstraps. He told us we would never be anything without an education. My mother played a part because she was the one that was always there with the money. She cleaned houses and no matter what we needed she said don't worry I'll get the money. They both told us to go all the way with our education and not let anyone stand in our way.

For these students, the fact that their parents set educational goals for them at an early age, resulted in their acceptance of the notion that attending college was mandatory. Conceivably, because most of the respondent's mothers participated in the work force and/or the community, they were able to observe the treatment of their families and were cognizant of the restrictions and limited options. Subsequently, setting educational goals was a proactive action that emerged as a result of the mother's/parents' own unfulfilled aspirations, and the knowledge of what awaited their daughter's out in the real world. Setting educational goals and alternatively instilling values such as the work ethic, self sufficiency, and helping their daughters throughout their schooling years had the effect of developing a specific type of mindset for these Chicana students.

D. Value and/or Importance of Education

Respondents were asked to recall whether their parents placed a high value on education, and if they stressed the importance of education while they were growing up. Most of the subjects recalled that their mother, more than their father, taught them to value education as they were growing up. It is also interesting to note that these students recalled that their mother made the majority of decisions and their father was less involved in decision-making. In all of these homes, it was the mother who was responsible for making major decisions about family issues such as education. The fathers, for the most part, accepted most of the mothers' decisions, especially when it came to education.

> Although it was never discussed, my Mom wore the pants in the family. I think it had to do with the fact that my Dad worked long hours and he was always too tired or unaware of

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> what needed to be done on a daily basis. Mom had a part-time job as a housekeeper, and she always made it a point to tell us how she didn't want us to wind up like her and Dad. Not that she was ashamed of what they did for a living, but she always stressed the importance of getting a good education. Whenever we had family gatherings, like a wedding or a baptism, she would make it a point to tell my Grandparents how well we were doing in school. It made us feel important. My father would usually nod his head in agreement, . . . I could tell he was real proud of our accomplishments. We attended a Catholic school, even though Dad kept complaining that we couldn't afford it. It paid off . . . all of my brothers and sisters eventually went to college.

In a few of the families, both parents emphasized the importance of education during their growing up years, stressed the importance of going to college, and expected their sons and daughters to graduate from college. A 23 year-old student recalled that both of her parents were instrumental in conveying the importance of college and motivated her to go to college:

> My mother valued it and my father valued it because I was the first one to go to college. They both said that I would only be successful if I went to college. My mother said I could be a pediatrician or a lawyer, and my father suggested that I go into the business field.

One Chicana, however, remembered that neither of her parents were influential in instilling the value of an education as she was growing up:

> . . . she has not been a strong role model in influencing me to go to college. My Dad's attitude was that if your wanted to go on to college, it was okay. But if you wanted to work instead, that was okay too.

This 43 year-old subject also revealed that while she was growing up,

her father was an alcoholic. Her mother was so busy raising a large family, that she rarely expressed any opinions about the value of education. She explained that the barriers she encountered while attending college were even more difficult because she was a single mother with three young children. However, she did have an aunt who had two years of community college education. The aunt had encouraged her to get a college degree for as long as she could remember. Contrary to a popular but erroneous perception that Latino parents do not value education or that they don't have high aspirations for their children, these parents and in particular mothers, transmitted the importance of education to their daughters at an early age. With the exception of one Chicana, mothers wielded high levels of decision-making power which enabled them to impress upon their daughters the ideology that education was important.

E. Psychological-Emotional Support

Respondents were asked to describe whether their parents or significant others provided psychological and other types of emotional support. Most of them recalled that although their parents and other family members were unable to give them economic support for college expenses, they had received extensive psychological-emotional support in the form of constant reinforcement of the importance of their education, along with other types of material assistance. The following are recollections of two Chicanas who had help from their husband and their mother:

> . . . my husband did the cooking, cleaning, and child care. He also supported me financially. His help greatly contributed to my mental well being. My children were very proud of me and that made me want to do well in school. Their support also helped me emotionally because I didn't feel guilty about having to be away from home so often.

> . . . when I attended another college, my mother helped me and took care of my daughter. At present, I am living with my mother. She helped me financially and emotionally. Be-

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> cause of her help I didn't feel stressed or worried about my daughter. My siblings and the entire family also helped me (financially and emotionally). They volunteered to drive me back and fourth to school when I didn't have a car . . . which saved me money.

Another 38 year old Chicana remembered very vividly, the emotional roller coaster she experienced while attending college.

> There were days when I didn't know if I was coming or going. Between the exams, term papers, and my job I can honestly say that I owe it to my Abuelita and Mom. They would clean my house, fix my meals, and do my laundry. But more than that they were always there for me. I remember one time when I was near mental collapse because of this math class I was taking. My Abuelita kept telling me "You can make it. You have what it takes. Remember you come from a long line of mujeres fuertes." That was enough to keep me going until I finally passed the math class. My madrecita, what can I tell you. She was my rock, my inspiration. She would pray to the Virgen de Guadalupe to help me succeed. Every Sunday she would light a candle for me.

For many of these Chicanas, familial emotional/psychological support made the difference between failing or succeeding. Help with child care, cooking, cleaning, and transportation gave the women peace of mind, and this enabled them to complete their college degree. Additionally, neither respondents or their families interpreted going to college as an individually oriented activity; but rather, perceived as it as a family affair. This team effort orientation gave the respondents much needed emotional and some material support.

Mentors

Gándara (1995) defines mentoring ". . . as a process by which a particular individual dramatically affected the orientation to schooling of the subject" (p. 66). Similarly in this study, the mentor refers to the person(s) who inspired, encouraged, and nurtured the student's educational aspirations during their college experience. Chicana students were asked whether they had sought and/or received information on financial assistance, scholarships and advising or mentoring while attending college. A few of the students recalled that no one had provided them with such assistance, or that they had received such help from one of the White college counselors. A 42 year old single mother of four remembered an incident that occurred during her high school years:

> I had a guidance coordinator in twelfth grade who was harsh and condescending. He did not encourage me. He tried to stop me from graduating. When I questioned him, he got angry. I went to the administration and told them what happened. But nothing was resolved. I was, however, given a new counselor. This one helped me to graduate by telling me how to earn six more credits. When I graduated, my old counselor was handing out diplomas. He said to me "well, it looks like you made it after all." And I replied, "yes, and I did it all without your help." I walked away with great satisfaction. I was determined from that day on, that no one was ever going to keep me from getting what I wanted, ever again.

Several respondents recalled receiving mentoring and other types of assistance from Chicano/Latino college professors. For example, a 42 year-old Chicana recollected several people who made all the difference for her educational accomplishments:

> At the community college it was a counselor named Diaz. At another community college it was a Biology teacher who was Hispanic. I looked him up because he was one of the very few Hispanics at the college. Then I had a sociology class with a teacher named Macias who was Hispanic. He said anybody could go to school and major in Sociology, so I decided to do it. At the community college I sought Diaz because he was a counselor and Latino, and he understood me. He would help

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me in selecting my classes and just be there for me.

Several other students who majored in Sociology and Social Work, named a Chicana professor who they felt had an important influence on them because she encouraged them and served as a role model.

> At this university, it was a Chicana, because she is a woman she understood me. Also, because she was the only sociology professor, she was a role model for me and other Latinas. I could go and talk to her about my goals and dreams, and she always made me feel like I was important. Before she was hired, all of the professors were White. I would go and ask the White professors for advice on what classes to take, but I never felt comfortable telling them that I wanted to go graduate school. I think it had to do with my GPA which was below a 3.0 . . . I was embarrassed. When this Chicana professor was hired I changed advisors, and asked her about my chances of going to graduate school. She said "yes you should apply, but let's work on getting your GPA higher than a 3.0." She told me about her own college experience. Apparently, she started out with remedial classes in English and Math, but she was eventually able to get her GPA to up to 3.8. I was really nspired . . . and I decided that if she could do it, I could do it too. I graduated . . . I applied for several graduate programs, and guess what? I was just accepted for the Ph.D. program at the University of Southern California.

The importance of Chicano/Latino mentors cannot be overstated: they play a key role in terms of providing academic as well as psychological/emotional support for Chicano/Latino students. For these respondents, Latino mentors were a source of inspiration, information, and provided a safe haven for them.

Personal Characteristics

Students were asked to list personal characteristics they believed might have helped them to graduate from a four-year institution. The responses were numerous, but the most consistent ones were perseverance, self-determination, self-sufficiency, motivation, hard work, dedication, and persistence. In addition to specific personal characteristics, some of the respondents also said that they wanted to make their family proud. As one 26 year old Chicana recalled, "I was motivated to do the work on my own, but I also cared about what my parents thought and what they had gone through for us." Another 25 year-old student attributed her success in graduating from college to personal characteristics and family support:

> My determination and my family supporting me. Being the third person in my family to go to college was important to me . . . I wanted to be a good role model for the rest of my family. This has guided me.

And finally, a 22 year-old Chicana emphasized the importance of being a good role model for her family:

> I'm very ambitious. You have to be to survive. I have worked hard. I wanted to set a good example for my siblings and my community. I wanted to show them that nothing should stop you.

None of the twenty respondents listed ability or intelligence as a reason for their success. Instead, they attributed their success to characteristics that they learned from their parents, especially their mothers. The fact that their parents taught them from an early age to be self reliant, value the work ethic and education, and set educational goals became an internal part of these their personality characteristics.

Summary and Recommendations

The purpose of this paper was to evaluate the importance of parental support and encouragement, mentors, and personal characteristics on college completion rates among Chicana students. Semi-structured interviews conducted with twenty Chicana students from

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Southern California who graduated from a four-year state institution indicate that the majority of students had parents that socialized them to be self-reliant, independent, and to value the work ethic. Second, many of the subjects recalled receiving help from their parents during their early schooling years. A third finding was that mothers played a crucial role in helping their daughters set educational goals. Fourth, all of the respondents reported that since their parents valued education, they also grew up viewing education as highly desirable. A fifth finding is that most of the subjects did not receive adequate mentoring and advising in college, and those who did receive it had access to only a handful of Latino mentors, who had a profound impact on their educational aspirations. Sixth, psychological/emotional support was cited as a very important influence on the respondent's educational attainment. Finally, respondents believed that individual characteristics such as motivation, ambition, perseverance, and wanting to be a role model for others, played an instrumental role in helping them to achieve their goal of graduating from college.

These findings challenge stereotypes and myths that the Chicano community does not value education, that Chicano parents are not interested in their children's education, that Chicano parents do not instill self-reliance, independence, and the work ethic in their children; and that familism has a negative influence on educational attainment. It may be that for most of these working-class parents (especially the mothers), socializing their daughters to be self sufficient, independent, have a strong work ethic, and value education is in response to their own experience with racism, sexism, and classism. Although educators often have lower expectations for low-income minority students (Percell 1993, Phillips 1983), these Chicanas have been socialized and empowered by their parents—especially their mothers—to embrace characteristics that have enabled them to successfully complete a four-year degree.

Of significant importance is also the fact that with the retreat of Affirmative Action in California, it is likely that Chicanas and other minorities will encounter even greater obstacles as we enter the new millennium. Consequently, it is crucial that we begin to develop a new Latino educational attainment agenda and new perspective that includes the following components. First, we need a new formula for

college preparation (Duran 1994). Subsequently, Chicanos fare poorly on competency tests because they are being tested on material they have not been taught. This presents a serious policy issue. Assessment based on competency tests should not be used as a gatekeeping devise, especially given the fact that these tests do not address the development of human potential. Instead, assessment should be for the purpose of giving students diagnostic feedback, and/or referral for remediation and counseling. In short, college admissions criteria should include the student's economic background, whether or not they were tracked into non-academic coursework, parent's level of education, and cultural capital.

Second, once minority students are admitted to the university, there needs to be a concrete plan in place that ensures successful completion of a four year degree and beyond. That is, it is not enough to admit Chicanos/Latinos to the university. This is especially true for Chicanas with families who may be single mothers and have additional responsibilities that traditional students do not have. At the state university where this study was conducted, women outnumber men, and many are commuter-reentry students and single mothers. Although women in general have similar issues, women of color such as Chicanas and other women of color have specific issues and needs different from Anglo women. Most Latinos (84%) do not follow a traditional path (graduation within four years); but instead follow a six year college completion rate (de los Santos and Rigual 1994). One suggestion is that in addition to the traditional college path, universities could offer a nontraditional path that includes credit for community service and work experience. Additionally, offering quality/comprehensive computer and/or weekend courses in the respective communities, would certainly enable students with family responsibilities to complete some of their coursework at home or close to home. A second recommendation is to lobby legislators to make it mandatory for institutions of higher education to quantify or specify objectives (similar to public schools). For example, by the year 2005 all minorities will complete their four-year degree at the same rate as White students.

Third, reconceptualizing Chicanos/Latinos as a "problem" people is a must, given the demographic changes that have taken place. As

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long as we allow the media to cast Latinos as a group with fixed abilities, apolitical, foreigners, etc., women like the ones in this study will continue to face sexism, classism, and racism in higher education and other institutions. A final related issue are the social science models used to examine Latino educational attainment. Much of the social science literature continues to portray Mexicanas/Chicanas as subservient to men, having no decision-making power within the home, and not academically oriented. And as we have seen, the subjects in this study had mothers who were the impetus behind their accomplishments, had a say so in their children's education, and made sure their daughters valued education. Social science models of educational attainment must include a focus on demographic changes, and how the intersection of race/ethnicity, class and gender affects Chicana/Latina students differently from other racial/ethnic female students. Additionally, as this study has shown, nontraditional factors that serve as protective and compensatory resources, mediate the negative effects of "at-risk" conditions, and should be included in any analyses of Latino achievement and access. We can no longer afford to formulate social policy based on outdated modes of thought. The challenges we face as social scientists in the coming decade will require creativity, sensitivity, embracing of new theoretical approaches, and the willingness to confront and dismantle entrenched systems of racism, classism, and sexism.

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