A Qualitative Study of Resilient Latina/o College Students

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This study was conducted with 11 Latina/o college students in order to provide insight into how these students develop a sense of resilience. Five factors from J. H. McMillan and D. F. Reed’s (1994) concept of resiliency appeared to play an important role in these students’ high academic achievement: high educational goals, sup-

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port and encouragement from parents, intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control, and high self-efficacy. Recommendations for future research are offered, and implications for practice are presented.

Key words: Latina/o, resiliency, academic achievement, higher education

It is well documented that the Latina/o population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States (Quijada & Alvarez, 2006). In addition, statistical analyses have illustrated that Latina/o students have the highest dropout rate of any ethnicity in the United States (American Council on Education, 2008). Because of the growing Latina/o population, there is utility in understanding those factors that facilitate the academic performance of Latina/o students. Morales (2008) stated, “The focus on positive and successful Hispanic students should be continued. By exploring those who have been successful, a deeper understanding of achievement processes can be attained” (p. 25). It is also important to note that this study attempts to build and provide a different perspective on findings from J. Cavazos, Johnson, Cavazos, and Sparrow (in press), which involved the same participants. Hopefully, findings from the present study will provide insight into the factors that help Latina/o students succeed, thereby enabling and encouraging other Latina/o students to continue with their education.

First, the current article provides a literature review that highlights (a) the reasons for Latina/o students’ low academic achievement and (b) the factors that help students in general succeed academically. Second, we introduce resiliency as a theoretical framework to help interpret and understand findings from the current study. Third, findings from personal interviews with 11 Latina/o college students are presented. And finally, implications for research and practice are presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term at-risk describes students who have a greater probability for academic failure due to adverse circumstances (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005). In explaining Latina/o students’ high dropout rates, Fuentes (2006) commented, “In examining the list of influences, school and contextual factors were cited most frequently, rather than personal factors, as reasons for dropping out” (p. 27). In addition to the school and contextual factors identified by Fuentes, curriculum tracking (J. Cavazos, Cavazos, Hinojosa, & Silva, 2009; Gandara, 1995; Herrera, 2003) and lack of information about higher education (Immerwahr, 2003; Zalaquett, 2005) also likely play a role in preventing Latina/o students from enrolling in higher education. Furthermore, we hypothesize that these individual factors may function in
a systemic manner, thereby increasing the likelihood of a less than desirable outcome.

At the high school level, the concept of curriculum tracking is based on teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of students’ ability levels (Valencia, 2002) and involves actively discouraging Latina/o students from pursuing higher education (A. G. Cavazos, 2009; Gandara, 1995). In a study of 50 Latinas/os who obtained advanced degrees, Gandara highlighted the distinction between the college track and the non-college track. Findings revealed that 30% of these eventually high-achieving students were tracked away from higher education. In addition to having negative interpersonal effects, tracking implied to these students that adult authority figures in their lives held low expectations for them. The following is part of a statement from a student who was not in the college track regarding his school counselor: “And I told him I would like to go to college and could he fit me into college-prep classes … And he looked at my grades and everything, and said, well, he wasn’t sure I could handle it” (Gandara, 1995, p. 61). Moreover, in a study of Latina/o students who dropped out of high school, Davison-Aviles, Guerrero, Barajas-Howarth, and Thomas (1999) found that many students believed they were pushed away from education by administrators and school counselors. A Latino student reported that his counselor and principal told him that he would not graduate from high school (Davison-Aviles et al., 1999).

Lack of college information is another hurdle faced by Latina/o students. In a study of Latina/o high school seniors, Immerwahr (2003) found that some students were not given sufficient information with regard to higher education. One student provided the following account of her experience during a university tour:

My high school took some of us up there last February, and I was worried about whether or not I could apply still, and I discussed it with the tour guide. It was a random question and he explained it. Because it is a state college they give you time to decide, so you can apply in the fall or at the end of summer. (Immerwahr, 2003, p. 5)

Immerwahr found that the deadline was July 1, and this student evidently did not receive the correct information from the tour guide, her school counselor, or her teachers. In addition, a participant from Zalaquett’s (2005) study with Latina/o college students provided the following comment:

I wish I would have been educated about the intricacies of college admissions and preparation. I ended up not attending the 1st year because I couldn’t complete all the required paperwork and didn’t know that I qualify for a scholarship. (p. 39)

Despite challenges to pursuing higher education, recent studies have illustrated that some Latina/o students have become academically successful. Zalaquett (2005) found the following factors to be vital in the academic success of Latina/o
college students: family support, high value of education, and responsibility toward siblings. Moreover, Ceballo (2004) interviewed 10 Latina/o college students and found the following factors to be important in their high academic achievement: parents’ emphasis on higher education, the establishment of autonomy, nonverbal support from parents for higher education, and the importance of mentors and role models. In addition, Arellano and Padilla (1996) conducted a study with 30 Latina/o college students and found that some students believed that school personnel (e.g., teachers) played an important role in their decision to pursue higher education.

Although research has uncovered factors that help Latina/o students do well academically, only 8% of such students will obtain a graduate degree (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). There appears to be benefits to improving the understanding of how those who succeed in higher education perceive their life experiences (Morales, 2008). Although constructs such as the trait of hardiness (i.e., a commitment to a meaningful life, an internal locus of control, and interest in learning from experiences with positive or negative valence; Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1992) have been linked with an individual’s resilience (Bonanno, 2004), less attention has been given to the concept of resiliency in order to understand the high academic achievement of Latina/o college students.

Resiliency is defined as “the ability to cope with adversity and overcome the most challenging circumstances” (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005, p. 319). McMillan and Reed (1994) contended that positive interpersonal relationships (e.g., high expectations from family) and individual factors (e.g., goal setting, intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control, and high self-efficacy) play a role in developing resiliency. First, family support results in high expectations and encourages students to pursue those expectations. Second, resilient students have concrete and high goals with regard to their academic futures (McMillan & Reed, 1994). McMillan and Reed also used the term reality check to describe a circumstance in a student’s life (e.g., poverty) that illustrates the importance of setting high educational goals and demonstrates that opportunities could be minimal without higher education. Third, resilient students have high levels of intrinsic motivation (i.e., participating in an activity for self-interest, challenge, or enjoyment; Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 2005). Fourth, resilient students have an internal locus of control and believe that (a) effort and hard work are important and (b) goals are influenced by these individual actions (Rotter, 1954). And finally, resilient students have high self-efficacy, which is the belief in one’s abilities to successfully complete certain tasks (Bandura, 1995). Ultimately, McMillan and Reed contended that the development of resiliency involves a combination of intrinsic (e.g., the student wants to become successful) and extrinsic (e.g., the student has support from family) factors.

The current study included interviews with 11 Latina/o college students in order to explore those factors that facilitated their high academic achievement. Five resiliency factors (McMillan & Reed, 1994) provide the framework within which
these students’ perspectives are presented. All participants had (a) high grade point averages and (b) prestigious academic credentials. In addition, nine participants were the first in their families to attend college despite growing up in adverse conditions (e.g., poverty).

METHODS

Participants

Eleven Latina/o students from a Hispanic-serving institution in the southwestern United States were recruited to participate in the current study. A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select students who met the following criteria: identified as racially Chicana/o, Hispanic, or Latina/o; had a grade point average of 2.9 or higher; and were enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student. In order to recruit participants, the lead author sent an e-mail to several student organizations at this Hispanic-serving institution and requested participation. Several students responded to this initial e-mail and were asked to recommend other students (i.e., snowball sampling; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Institutional review board approval was obtained prior to participant recruitment.

All of this study’s participants identified themselves as Hispanic, Chicana, or Latina/o. The term *Latina/o* is used here to describe each participant, which is consistent with previous literature (Zalaquett, 2005). Furthermore, participants were asked to select a fictitious name to ensure anonymity and to provide a method of identification. These fictitious names are used here to identify each participant.

Personal Interviews

An interview script was used to ensure consistency. Based on the relevant literature regarding the success of Latina/o students (e.g., Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Gandara, 1995), the interview script consisted of open-ended questions that were designed to elicit the participants’ perceptions of the factors they felt influenced their high academic achievement. Questions specifically addressed participants’ perceptions of the role of parental support and personal qualities in their academic achievement (e.g., “What do you think are some of the qualities that have helped you become successful during college?”). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the lead author.

Data Analysis

Three researchers with previous experience categorized participants’ stories and statements according to the resiliency factors (McMillan & Reed, 1994). The first
reviewer was a graduate student who has extensive experience working with the Latina/o population and a counseling internship. The second reviewer has an extensive background in qualitative research and experience in qualitative coursework (i.e., a Ph.D in Counseling Psychology) and had published several qualitative journal articles. The third reviewer also had experience in qualitative research, particularly with the analysis of personal interviews.

Trustworthiness

Several steps were followed to enhance this study’s trustworthiness. First, Latina/o students were purposefully selected to ascertain first-hand perspectives regarding the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that were involved in their high academic achievement. Because of their success in higher education, these participants may have provided valuable insight into the factors that help Latina/o students succeed academically. Second, three researchers with previous experience analyzed the participants’ responses. And finally, the lead author believed he created a safe and non-threatening environment via reflective listening and the conveying of empathy, thereby facilitating the participants’ ability to provide personal and relevant insights.

RESULTS

The findings are presented within a framework of the following resiliency factors: goal setting, interpersonal relationships, intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control, and self-efficacy. Specific statements and stories are used to illustrate participants’ beliefs about those factors contributing to their high academic achievement.

Goal Setting

All of this study’s participants reported having academic goals that included obtaining some form of education beyond the baccalaureate level. Moreover, these participants provided clear and specific goals. For example, Alicia mentioned how she wanted to continue with her education beyond completion of a bachelor’s degree. She stated, “My goals do include graduating from college, getting a master’s, getting possibly a PhD.” Veronica also reported having clear goals about her career in academia. She said, “Finishing my dissertation. That’s my goal … Then after that, getting my job and teaching at a university. And after that, getting a book out. And after that, maybe getting another degree.” Mary also described her goal of pursuing an advanced degree:
I thought about going into education, but I thought the biggest impact I could achieve was getting a law degree or getting something related to that field because that’s where you can get to help the most people that you can as far as issues are concerned.

Finally, Michael stated that his goals included obtaining a doctoral degree and teaching at a university. He provided the following account: “I am a history and political science professor in the future.”

Nine of this study’s participants had grown up in poverty and were first-generation college students. These students had been subjected to adverse living conditions that included housing made of straw, living from paycheck to paycheck, and worrying if food would be on the dinner table. Their statements provided insight into possible motivators (i.e., reality checks; McMillan & Reed, 1994) for their identified goals. For example, Alicia had witnessed the struggles of her father in his occupation and had seen how her family did not have money while she was growing up:

Right now, he is working as a mechanic, and I see that he works long hours and he tries really hard. He is always frustrated because he says he doesn’t have enough to give us. And what happens is that he comes home, and you look at his hands, and they are so old and so dry and worn, and he says it’s because he didn’t get that education.

Similarly, Monica talked about her parents’ struggles when she reported, “I see the struggle my parents had, just to get by, to make the payments.” Mary also provided insight into her parents’ struggles with the following account: “I learned along the way based on the things that I’ve seen in my family. My family struggled, first of all. They lived in a car for two years.” Unlike Alicia, Monica, and Mary, who described their parents’ struggles, Michael had experienced the demands of manual labor first hand. He described his experience as follows:

I didn’t want that type of life where I was sweating in the sun and getting paid minimum wage, and sometimes not even minimum wage, but sometimes you got kind of paid by contract … you had to finish 10 acres in so many days or so many hours. By the time you finish those 10 acres, you get paid a certain amount. So I kind of started realizing, not that I ever questioned myself about going to college, but I started realizing more of the value in education, and especially postsecondary education.

Interpersonal Relationships

Each participant reported having support from his or her family. This support included (a) high expectations and (b) encouragement to fulfill those expectations. Jose reported, “My parents, from the time I was born, said education was the most important thing you can have.” Michael, who had been a migrant farm worker as
an adolescent, stated that his parents also stressed the importance of education from an early age. He said, “The weird thing about my family in particular is that they didn’t go to school, but they always instilled in us this responsibility or civic duty to go to school.” Furthermore, most of this study’s participants described encouragement from their parents. Daniel stated, “They just encourage me. If I want to accelerate in my studies or take extra hours [college classes] or I want to do something, they’ll encourage me to do it.”

Another form of support included written communications at difficult points in an academic semester. For instance, Veronica recalled an undergraduate course in which her professor told her that she would not succeed because she was Latina. She described the ensuing support from her parents:

> Family support is also very important. I left home when I went off for undergrad. I left also to go get my master’s. And family support was always there. My parents sending me little notes saying “You can do it” and “Mija, we love you. You’re going to do great on finals.”

Although most participants reported high parental expectations and encouragement to reach those expectations, other participants offered a different perspective. When Mary wanted to apply to one state’s flagship university, which was 4 hr from her home, her father did not approve. Mary said,

> I told my dad I’m planning to apply to [university]. I want to apply here, I want to apply there. He said, “No, you’re not going to apply because if you apply and if you go off somewhere else, we’re going to disown you as a family. We’re not even going to talk to you, support you, or help you in any way if you go away.”

Monica also reported that her parents did not want her to leave for a university that was 3 hr from her home:

> They also played a very important part in me coming to [the university] because they’re very strong in being united. So the option of moving away to [the city] would not be a possibility … Basically if I left, I’d be disowned.

**Intrinsic Motivation**

All participants in this study reported presented statements that were congruent with high levels of intrinsic motivation. Mary provided the following representative quote of the enjoyment she felt when helping others: “I would have to say that I like to help people, particularly because I didn’t have that help.” Because Mary did not receive assistance in high school, she elaborated on how she developed this interest in helping others:
But mainly what really sparked that instinct for helping people was when I started getting involved in student government. That’s when I really felt like, “Wow, I did not know there was such a student government.” I didn’t know we could do that … When I get involved in [student government], this is amazing. It feels so good to be able to help people and know that you’re a voice that can represent people.

Veronica described how she enjoyed the role of student and community helper. She shared her enjoyment as follows:

I know that education is a way that I can change the world, be it by helping other students learn, or through ideas and developing ideas and helping my community. So that’s how I feel. I’m a lifelong student. I love it!

Rick, who was near the completion of his doctoral degree at the time of data collection, supplied this statement regarding intrinsic motivation: “But I have a bleeding heart for kids and I love to teach and as long as I can continue teaching, I will.” In addition, Jose stated that he wanted to help others because of his self-interest:

So after medical school, after my residency, what I would like to do is to go to a third-world country, and be there for about a year or two years, and offer my services. That’s the only thing I want to do. I want to be able to help other people; whether or not I get compensated for that is not high on my list.

And finally, Michael stated that his motivation came from self-interest and enjoyment. Although he had worked 12 hr per day as a migrant farm worker, he reported using his lunch break to read his encyclopedia. He shared the following experience:

A lot of what I know, honestly, is through these encyclopedias because I would spend the entire summer, like during the breaks while I was working, we would have a 45 minute break to eat, and I would spend my time reading.

As most participants had come from low-income households, they had endured struggles that included poverty and low expectations from the academic community. However, these experiences had a positive impact on the participants, who described the challenge of creating change. For example, Cristina reported that she wanted to reduce the achievement gap among ethnicities. She stated, “I would like for us to be at the same level academically with White people. Be able to compete without affirmative action.” Michael also discussed the achievement gap when he said, “It’s the fact that I want to get rid of the stereotype that Mexican Americans are indigent or they’re not capable of reaching the mentality or the achievements of other of what they would call ‘superior’ ethnicities.” Ultimately, Michael reported
that he was motivated by the challenge of changing attitudes toward Latinas/os from his area. He described his motivation as follows:

What motivates me more than wanting to, because I am not in it for the money, having grown up as a migrant farm worker I’ve been humbled, so it’s not the money, it’s mainly getting rid of that stereotype, showing what can come from [this area], what can come from the Mexican-American race.

Although all of the participants reported being intrinsically motivated, some participants mentioned external factors as sources of motivation. Alicia stated that money was a factor in her decision to pursue higher education. She said, “The money, because I know that if you don’t have an education, your career cannot go very far.” Amanda shared a similar sentiment: “I guess I’m working to be poor right now, and I want to improve myself. That way I can have money to go on vacations, to have money to save up for a house, and things like that.” However, Alicia and Amanda were motivated by intrinsic factors as well. Amanda shared, “But just being happy essentially with the money, if you have tons of money and you’re not happy, then it’s pointless. I guess they go hand in hand. They correlate.”

Internal Locus of Control

None of the participants in this study reported used stories or statements that represented an external locus of control. Each participant mentioned the importance of effort and hard work in the accomplishment of their goals, and they said that they were in control of their academic futures. For example, although obstacles could have affected Mary’s mentality toward her final goal, she believed she was in control of her academic future:

I thought to myself, “You know what, I’m kind of like in a race here. There’s a finish line, and the finish line is the goal that I achieve. I may trip and I may fall, but I need to get up to get to the finish line. If I don’t get up and I don’t go toward the finish line, then I’m never going to get there.”

Rick also discussed the importance of believing that he was in control of his academic future by working hard and improving his skills. He provided the following statement: “If you don’t build on your skills and if you don’t develop them, nobody else is going to go out and do that for you.” In addition, Alicia reported her belief that her effort allowed her to obtain a 3.2 grade point average in her undergraduate studies. She said, “I don’t want to say I’m smart because I think I just try, I don’t try as hard as I should, but I try and I know at the end of the day what I want.” Furthermore, Amanda mentioned the importance of surrounding herself with other students who were committed to education. She supplied this statement about taking control of her environment: “Just surrounding yourself with people that are doing
good, that are continuing their education. Their education helps me do good in school… I am surrounding myself with good people who are doing good for themselves.” In addition to taking control of her social environment, Amanda described how she was in control of her academic environment with the following statement: “I like to be prepared for class.”

Self-Efficacy

Some participants did not believe they were smart and believed other qualities were more important in their high academic achievement. In fact, only one participant included intelligence in response to the question “What do you think are some of the qualities that have helped you become successful during college?”

Most participants described effort, perseverance, and self-belief as the qualities they felt allowed them to become successful in college. For example, Mary provided her opinion of the importance of perseverance as she described her parents’ struggles and how they had overcome homelessness. Based on this experience, Mary realized that her parents were resilient in the face of adversity, which influenced her belief that she could be the same. Mary stated,

My family struggled. They lived in a car for two years, to owning two houses … What do I have to lose by just trying? Just try and go out there and try to do what you want to do because if they [my parents] were able to achieve that, what makes me think I can’t? It’s possible. I think it’s possible.

Moreover, effort and hard work were mentioned by Sandy, who commented,

I could say that the quality would be intelligence and all of this other stuff, but the truth of the matter is that it’s the tools that are the qualities. The tools of persevering, not giving up, trying your 110 percent.

Finally, Amanda described how her parents helped her develop a positive self-efficacy:

My parents would always say, “Amanda is going to go to college. Amanda is going to college.” It wasn’t that they pushed me, but they always backed me up and they always said, “Amanda is the smart one. She’s going to do good. She’s going to graduate. She’s going to go to college.”

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated 11 high-achieving Latina/o college students in order to provide insight into how they developed a sense of resilience. Several im-
portant findings were uncovered. First, the importance of valuing education in the Latina/o household continues to be strongly supported. In the current study, parental support included high educational goals and encouragement to pursue those goals. Although most participants reported that their parents were unable to contribute financially to their educational endeavors, the parents did provide support in other ways, including through supportive letters and words of encouragement. Without this parental support, it is possible that some of the participants may have given up and forgone higher education. Second, the findings indicate that there is not a single clear path to academic achievement. Some of this study’s participants were not high academic achievers in high school, yet they succeeded in higher education. Teachers and school counselors must understand that lack of success in high school does not necessarily result in lack of success in college or in any other endeavor. For example, Latina/o students who were tracked away from higher education because of IQ scores (Gandara, 1995) or perceived ability levels (A. G. Cavazos, 2009; Herrera, 2003) overcame low expectations and obtained advanced degrees. Therefore, it is important that teachers communicate high expectations to all Latina/o students (White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2003) regardless of academic achievement at the high school level.

Although goal setting is important in terms of academic success, the self-belief that one can accomplish those goals is likely more important. According to Maddux (2002), “The timeless message of research on self-efficacy is the simple, powerful truth that confidence, effort, and persistence are more potent than innate ability” (p. 285). Participants from the current study provide additional support for this from the perspective of the Latina/o culture. These students developed a belief that their efforts and hard work would result in high academic achievement, thereby facilitating the deep conviction that they were in control of their academic futures. Similar to previous research (Gandara, 1995), some students from the current study reported that they did not believe they were “smart” and cited other qualities, such as confidence and motivation, as being more important in facilitating their high academic achievement.

Understanding how resilient qualities help Latina/o students has important implications for teachers and school counselors. Many of this study’s participants reported that they were not the smartest individuals. They stated that hard work, effort, and persistence played a more important role than intelligence in their academic achievement, providing support for the contention that all Latina/o students should be introduced to the important concept of resiliency (Gandara, 1995). For example, if a Latina/o student reports that he or she is not smart (e.g., has a low SAT score) and that this is why he or she will not pursue higher education, a school counselor or teacher should help this student understand that applied hard work and persistence may be more important than ability or results on standardized tests. However, because telling students that they should try or work harder does
not result in higher academic achievement 100% of the time, teachers should try to provide students with real evidence that their efforts will influence their academic performance (Woolfolk, 1990). Based on previous research (Gandara, 1995; Woolfolk, 1990) and findings from the current study, it appears vital that teachers emphasize the importance of hard work and effort in attaining goals.

There are numerous benefits to teaching resiliency characteristics (e.g., self-efficacy and internal locus of control) in K–12 schools. Research has confirmed that children can become resilient regardless of minority ethnic status, single-parent family status, or low socioeconomic status (Castro, Johnson, & Smith, 2008; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Waxman & Huang, 1996). Moreover, Nelson and Low (2003) and Wolin and Wolin (1993) contended that resilient behaviors can be learned and practiced until they become fixed internal strengths. For example, resilience in students can be enhanced by school personnel via a choice curriculum, school policies, and leadership programs (Catterall, 1998). One program designed to improve students’ resiliency is the Teen Leadership Program (Flippen Group, 2005). The Teen Leadership Program fosters resiliency factors such as motivation and emotional and behavioral self-regulation, thereby improving students’ abilities to become more resilient to challenges (Castro et al., 2008; Flippen Group, 2005). In a study that examined the impact of the Teen Leadership Program with a group of seventh-grade students (58% of the sample were Latina/o students), Castro et al. found that teaching resiliency skills enhanced prosocial behaviors. That is, students who went through the resiliency curriculum had less office referrals than those students who did not receive the resiliency curriculum. Other research has also found that teaching resiliency skills can result in positive outcomes (Bernard, 1997; Bosworth & Earthman, 2002; Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

The practice of not allowing children to leave home for college is not uncommon in the Latina/o community (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000). Although two Latina students from the current study had not been allowed to leave home for college, teachers and counselors cannot confuse this practice with the notion that parents do not value education and do not support their child. Perhaps parents, particularly those who never attended college or finished high school, do not understand the differences among colleges, as research has found that they do not know what is involved in the college application process (Zalaquett, 2005). Instead of criticizing the Latina/o culture for its cohesiveness and its attitudes toward leaving home for college, teachers and counselors must (a) become aware of this cultural practice and perspective and (b) explain differences among institutions of higher learning. And finally, although parental attitudes toward advanced degrees were not explored in the current study, one participant provided the following statement: “My mother understands why I went for my master’s, but now in the doctorate, they’re like, ‘Is it that much harder? Why are you complaining? Are you ever going to finish?’” This participant’s mother had a col-
lege degree, but it is possible that she did not understand the requirements of a doctoral degree. Given the importance of parental support and encouragement in the Latina/o community, it appears that this support could also play a role in the pursuit of an advanced degree. Therefore, when parents are given college information they could also be given information about advanced degrees and the opportunities to pursue these degrees.

This study’s findings support the existence of an interactive system of factors that help Latina/o students become academically successful. Because some Latina/o parents may not set high expectations for their children, future research should explore how students become resilient and move toward academic achievement without their parents’ support and encouragement. In addition, two participants who had prestigious academic credentials reported that their siblings dropped out of high school and did not pursue higher education. The participants and their siblings had similar histories (i.e., genetic pool, home and school environment), yet there was a difference in academic achievement. Future research that looks into the intrinsic factors (e.g., self-efficacy) that differentiate academically successful Latina/o students from their less successful siblings will improve understanding in this domain. Finally, the current study did not identify students who were exposed to resiliency factors but who did not succeed academically. Future research that attempts to recruit and study such a participant base is warranted.

Because only 11 Latina/o participants were interviewed for the current study, the generalizability of the results is not known. However, this study’s findings are consistent with the literature regarding Latina/o students, which supports (a) the existence of high expectations from parents (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006; Zalaquett, 2005), (b) the importance of higher education (Zalaquett, 2005), and (c) the maintenance of an internal locus of control (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005) and high self-efficacy (Morales, 2008). Because the students who participated in the present study attended the same university, their experiences and personal attributes may differ from those students who attend other universities. In addition, most participants from the current study responded to an e-mail that requested their participation, so persons who volunteered may differ from those who did not (Sanchez et al., 2006).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to provide insight into those resiliency factors that help Latina/o students move toward greater academic achievement. The following factors were not only important to all participants but appeared to play an important role in each student’s resiliency: high educational goals, support and encouragement from parents, intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control, and high self-efficacy. Given these findings, it is recommended that school personnel
provide Latina/o students with high expectations and implement resiliency skills into daily activities.

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