A Narrative Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Date of Approval:
October 7, 2010

Keywords: Puerto Rican Studies, Academic Persistence, Academic Resilience, Social Role, Phenomenology

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to those individuals who may read or hear about this work and become inspired to persist through the educational pipeline.
Acknowledgments

I would like express my undying love and gratitude to my husband and best friend Mike for his unconditional support during my doctoral studies. As of this writing, we have been married for six years, and I have spent five of those years as a doctoral student. I cannot thank Mike enough for his emotional and financial support, for taking on extra household duties when I was unavailable, for patiently waiting for me when I needed to put my school work first, and for taking most of the responsibility for taking care of our four schnauzers Magnum, Ranger, Chase, and Skylar Rose. It was Mike who kept me balanced through it all.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the members of my committee, Dr. Young, Dr. Janesick, Dr. Alvarez-McHatton, and Dr. Blank. I would like to thank Dr. Young for inspiring the initiation and completion of this doctoral degree, and for introducing me to the notion that leadership comes from the fringes. Dr. Young made me believe that I could. I would like to thank Dr. Janesick for exposing me to qualitative research and for showing me the value of serendipitous events: Dr. Janesick showed me the way and the meaning. I would like to thank Dr. Alvarez-McHatton for introducing me to the value of performing research findings in creative and unconventional ways. Dr. Alvarez showed me the possibilities. I would like to thank Dr. Blank for unselfishly
offering to help me with this dissertation, even post retirement. *Dr. Blank showed me the value of making time for others.*

I would like to thank my research participants for making this study possible. They generously gave me their time, graciously shared their personal stories, and made me feel warm and accepted, like a long lost cousin during the process. *They showed me the power of Puerto Rican unity.* I would especially like to thank Angie for helping me to connect with her sister, and the other individuals who participated in this study. *Angie opened the doors.*
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Abstract

A review of the literature indicates that Latinos lag behind Whites and Blacks in college degree attainment. This educational disparity is of concern because Latinos are currently the largest minority group in the United States, and the Latino population is expected to increase exponentially in the future. College degree attainment for Latinos is imperative because statistics show an undeniable relationship between degree attainment and income level. In order to ensure the economic wellbeing of Latinos, it is important that Latinos persist through college degree programs. This is especially true for Puerto Ricans because they are the second largest Latino subgroup.

The majority of college persistence and departure literature applies to students in general and some of the studies focus on Latino College students. However, fewer studies explore the perspectives of Latinos with the process of graduate or doctoral degree attainment. This is especially true of Latinos of specific ethnic backgrounds such as Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican. I conducted this study in order to address this gap in the literature.

This study described and explained the perspectives of a purposive sample of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education by exploring those social and cultural factors that influenced their perceptions, and served as educational facilitators or barriers to their doctoral attainment. The questions that guided the study were: 1. What are the
components of their perspectives? and; 2. What social-cultural variables influenced their perspectives?

In order to answer the research questions, I interviewed eight Puerto Ricans with doctorates who were affiliated with the GOTHAM educational system in the state of New York. In order to collect the data, I went to New York in February and March 2010 and conducted face to face interviews with the participants, which were recorded. After I recorded the interviews, I transcribed the data, which I analyzed using a software program called Atlas.ti. I analyzed the data by coding the excerpts, which I identified as the subthemes or variables of this study. The subthemes were coalesced into major themes, which were validated by peer review, several iterations of member check, and data triangulation. After coming to a consensus at all levels of validation, I determined that the emergent themes were in fact evidence of the components of the perceptions of the participants’ experiences with doctoral attainment. Those components are Personal Factors, Social Role Factors, Cultural Factors, and Social Factors.

Based on the analysis of the data, the most profound influence to the perception of the participants’ lived doctoral experiences was that of the interaction of being a doctoral student, or Adult Learner, with at least one other social role. The most commonly reported negative interaction was being an Adult Learner and a Worker at the same time. Having a lack of Finances, No Latino Role Models, experiencing Negative Events by Ethnicity, and struggling with Self-Efficacy served as barriers to most of the participants. Having Peer Networks and Faculty Support served as facilitators to most of the participants. In order to add to the usefulness of this study, I asked the participants for
their advice to future or current doctoral students, and for suggestions to faculty and administrators of higher education. I included their responses as part of this study.
Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

A review of the literature indicates that Latinos lag behind Whites and Blacks in college degree attainment. This educational disparity is of concern because Latinos are currently the largest minority group in the United States, and the Latino population is expected to increase exponentially in the future. College degree attainment for Latinos is imperative because statistics show an undeniable relationship between degree attainment and income level. In order to ensure the economic wellbeing of Latinos, it is important that Latinos persist through college degree programs. This is especially true for Puerto Ricans because they are the second largest Latino subgroup.

The majority of college persistence and departure literature applies to students in general and some of the studies focus on Latino College students. However, fewer studies explore the perspectives of Latinos with the process of graduate or doctoral degree attainment. This is especially true of Latinos of specific ethnic backgrounds such as Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican. I conducted this study in order to address this gap in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education. The study explored those social and cultural
variables that influenced their perceptions, and served as educational facilitators or barriers. This study also examined how this group of doctoral graduates perceived their social role demands, and how they prioritized these responsibilities as they pursued their education.

**Exploratory Questions That Guided the Study**

In an effort to draw forth the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education, I used the following exploratory research questions to guide the study:

1. What are the components of their perspectives?
2. What social-cultural variables influenced their perspectives?

In order to answer the research questions, I used a set of research methods that included the collection of multiple interviews, analysis of books and articles, data triangulation, reflective journal entries, and theme validation via member checks and peer review.

**Research Design**

This was a descriptive qualitative study that employed a phenomenological research approach in order to describe the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education. Based on my review of the literature, few studies have addressed the academic success of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates as they navigated their path to doctoral attainment. I chose a descriptive qualitative design because the purpose of the research was to describe and explain the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates with the process of doctoral attainment as a phenomenon. This design
was also chosen because I intended to encourage the participants to share their stories through the interview process, a method common to qualitative research designs.

**Theoretical Framework**

I employed a phenomenological theoretical framework for this study in order to explicate the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates with the doctoral attainment process. Phenomenology is one type of qualitative research approach that seeks to assign meaning to the lived experience of individuals with a phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) states that “the aim of phenomenology is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13).

In an effort to understand the experience of doctoral attainment as a phenomenon, from the perspective of Puerto Rican graduates, I interviewed a total of nine research participants of Puerto Rican ethnicity who have had this experience. I interviewed one individual for the pilot study and I interviewed eight individuals for the research included in the final analysis. In order to collect the data, I conducted two formal face-to-face interviews with the final eight participants, and I corresponded with the participants by e-mail and telephone before and after the interviews. During the first interview, the participants were asked a series of questions from an interview protocol that elicited detailed discussion about what they experienced during the doctoral attainment process. The participants were asked about those things that were either frustrating or helpful, or specifically stated, those factors that served as educational facilitators or barriers. The research protocol questions were open-ended enough to allow for themes to emerge
during the course of the conversation. This method was used in order to ensure that the participants’ descriptions of the phenomena were grounded in what they said. During the second interview, the participants were asked follow-up questions based on the content of the first interview.

Usefulness of the Study

During the process of this study, a sample of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates shared their stories about their doctoral attainment experiences. The information gathered during the course of this study is useful in at least two ways. First, the results of this study will contribute to the literature concerning Latino college persistence, which may help address the Latino/White education gap. Second, this study may inspire others to pursue an advanced level of education because these educationally underrepresented individuals were successful in doing so.

Limitations of the Study

The most daunting task that I faced while conducting this study was locating the participants for it. I began searching for potential research participants in the summer of 2009. I first tried to find participants by word-of-mouth. When that proved unsuccessful, I turned to searching for participants by internet using various methods. One of the first things that I did was look up Latino social clubs at major universities throughout the state of Florida. I called the listed presidents of those clubs, but my telephone calls were not returned. I then began searching the on-line directories of universities throughout the state of Florida, looking for possible Puerto Rican surnames. I was able to find one individual this way, but based on the literature, I knew that I needed more than that.
According to Creswell (2007), an appropriate sample size for a phenomenological study ranges from three to ten participants. Anticipating the possibility of participant attrition, my goal was to find ten participants. Hence, I began looking out-of-state.

By the fall of 2009, I had located four participants who agreed to be interviewed. One individual resided in Florida, one in North Carolina, and two resided in New York. Both of the participants, who lived in New York, worked within an educational system in that state. Fortunately, one of the participants was able to put me in touch with other potential participants who were also faculty within that system: individuals who were of Puerto Rican ethnicity and who possessed doctorates. From this one contact, I was able to find 8 of the 9 individuals who initially agreed to participate in my study, hence my snowball sample.

However, one limitation of using a snowball sample of individuals for research is that they are usually not representative of the target population at large, in this case, Puerto Ricans with doctorates. According to Trochim (2006), this method hardly leads to representative samples, however there are times when this may be the best method available, and snowball sampling is especially useful when you are trying to reach populations that are inaccessible or hard to find. Considering the difficulty that I experienced in finding participants, this method of sampling was clearly appropriate for the purposes of this study.

Another limitation of this study was the fact that my research questions concerned the perceptions of a group of individuals with their doctoral experiences. As fate would have it, the individuals who participated in this study attained their doctorates in the
1980’s or 1990’s. Hence, the data that was collected from these participants were limited to their recollections of their doctoral experiences a decade or two after the experience occurred.

Note that in order to protect the identities of the participants, I changed their names and the names of the institutions where they completed their doctoral studies. I will refer to the New York educational system that they are affiliated with as GOTHAM, and I have also changed the names of “GOTHAM”’s associated colleges (the research sites) from this point forward.

**Delimitations of the Study**

I delimited the location of this study to the state of New York because I was able to find, with help, a concentration of Puerto Ricans with doctorates there. This study was further delimited to current or previous GOTHAM faculty members. Although the participants included in this study are not representative of the overall population of Puerto Ricans with doctorates, their data was no less meaningful. In fact, I felt that delimiting the study in this manner made the data more purposive. Defining the participants in this way meant that they had at least two threads that tied them together: they were all residents of the state of New York (most were native New Yorkers) and they all had a professional relationship with the GOTHAM system.

**Definition of Terms**

**Latino/a**: The term Latino/a includes those individuals, with at least one parent, who are of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Colombian, Honduran, Ecuadorian, Spanish, Peruvian, Argentinean, Costa Rican,
Chilean, Bolivian, or Panamanian decent, whether born in that country (or any recognized Latin country not listed) or in the United States, who self-identifies as being Latino/a or Hispanic.

**Puerto Rican**- The term Puerto Rican will be used in the broadest most inclusive way to include individuals with at least one parent of Puerto Rican descent, whether born in Puerto Rico or in the United States, who self-identifies as being Puerto Rican.

**Barrier**- For the purposes of this study the word barrier will include those experiences that served as obstacles that were frustrating, or adverse to the participants’ doctoral process.

**Facilitator**: For the purposes of this study the word facilitator will include those experiences that were helpful, useful to, or that enabled the participants’ doctoral process.

**Summary**

Based on my review of the literature, few studies have addressed the academic success of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates. I choose a descriptive qualitative design for this study in order to address this problem. This was a descriptive qualitative study that employed a phenomenological research approach in order to describe the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education. Currently, there is a paucity of literature that describes the experiences of Puerto Rican doctoral students as they navigated their path to doctoral attainment. I conducted this study in order to both address this gap in the literature, and to encourage and motivate those individuals who read their stories to pursue higher levels education. In chapter two, I will review the related literature.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education, particularly with the process of doctoral degree attainment. The questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the components of their perspectives?

2. What social-cultural variables influence their perspectives?

I will discuss the following categories in this literature review: a) Latinos in the United States, b) Latino educational attainment gap, c) Latino diversity, d) Puerto Ricans, e) Persistence/retention and dropout/attrition, f) Latino barriers to college enrollment, g) Latino college persistence and departure, h) Puerto Rican College student departure/persistence, i) College departure and persistence in general, j) Havighurst’s social roles literature, and k) Social role strain.

A review of the literature indicates that there is gap between the college attainment of Latinos and Whites and that the gap widens as the level of college degree rises. In an effort to address this achievement gap, a number of studies have been conducted in order to identify factors related to Latino college student persistence and departure. However, fewer studies explore the experiences of Latinos with the process of graduate or doctoral degree attainment. This is especially true of Latinos of specific
ethnic backgrounds such as Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican. This study is being conducted in order to address this gap in the literature.

**Latinos in the United States**

Since the turn of the century, Hispanics have accounted for just over half of the United States population growth (Fry, 2008). As of 2007, Latinos are the largest and the fastest growing minority group, with the largest concentration residing in California, followed by Texas, and Florida (Bernstein, 2008). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (Bernstein & Edwards, 2008), the Latino population is projected to nearly triple, from 46.7 million to 132.8 million during the 2008-2050 period, making for an anticipated population increase of 60% (Passel & Cohn, 2008).

**Latino Educational Attainment Gap**

Despite the Latino population growth, Latinos lag behind Whites and African Americans in high school diploma and college degree attainment. According to a report released by the U. S. Department of Education in September 2009, the percent of Latinos age 18 through 24 years old who attained a high school diploma in 2007 is 73% compared to African Americans, 89%, and Whites, 94% (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRanani, 2009); the authors also indicated that Latino students are more likely than White students to drop out of high school, 6 % event dropout rate for Latinos compared to 2.2 % for Whites.

As the Latino population has increased, so has Latino college enrollment. According to a Pew Hispanic Center analysis of data compiled by the U.S. Department of
Education, from the period of 1996-2001, first-time, full-time Latino freshman enrollment increased in seven of the most highly Latino populated states ranging from 6% in New York to 53% in Florida (Fry, 2005). As of 2007, Latino students comprise 12% of full-time college students, up from 10% in 2006 (Bernstein, 2009). Although Latinos continue to increase their sheer numbers in college, a review of Department of Education (2009) statistics from 2006-2007, illustrates that Latino College students continue to lag behind both White and African American college students in college degree attainment. This gap appears consistent across all levels of college degrees and widens as the level of degree rises from associate’s degree to doctoral and professional degrees. It should be noted that Latinos have the lowest doctoral degree attainment percentage (3.4%) of any minority/majority group except for American Indians/Alaska Natives. Table 1 compares degrees conferred among Whites, African Americans, and Latinos for the years 2006-2007.

This gap in academic achievement for Latinos is of concern because income level typically increases as educational attainment does. On April 27, 2009, the U.S. Census Bureau released a report indicating that based on new figures that outlined educational trends and achievement levels, workers with a bachelor’s degree earned about $26,000 more than those with only a high school education (Edwards, 2009). Americans, particularly Latinos should be concerned with these statistics because Latino participation in advanced degree programs is vital for their increased involvement in high levels of leadership, and considering the anticipated increases in the Latino population, the ability for Latinos to attain advanced professional degrees will ensure that Latino representation
is at parity with the demographics of the total population of the United States (De la Garza & Moghadam, 2008).

Table 1. Percentage of Degrees Conferred by Race/Ethnicity and Degree: 2006-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Level</th>
<th>White Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>African American Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associates Degree</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor’s Degree</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Because the Latino population is expected to continue to increase, it is important to ensure that Latinos persist through academic programs. According to Hernandez and Lopez (2004), the continued growth of Latino college-going population challenges college and university personnel to become better informed on the issues that affect persistence of this diverse group of students. Previous studies have addressed college persistence and departure for Latinos and for students in general. However, fewer studies address college persistence and departure factors related to specific Latino groups. Because Puerto Ricans are the second largest Latino group in the United States, this study will focus on the educational experiences of this Latino subgroup.
**Latino Diversity**

Latinos are a diverse group. According to the Pew Hispanic Center Fact Sheet, Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States (2008), as of 2006, the majority Hispanic population is comprised of Mexicans (64.1%), Puerto Ricans (9%), and Cubans (3.4%), followed by all other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino groups. Puerto Ricans comprise the second largest Latino specific ethnic group represented in the United States. As of 2007, 4.1 million Puerto Ricans lived in the United States and the majority of this population lives in New York (26.1%), Florida (17.8%), and New Jersey (9.7%) (“Hispanics of Puerto Rican,” 2009). According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2009), there are currently more Puerto Ricans (4.1 million) living in the United States mainland than are living in Puerto Rico (3.9 million).

**Puerto Ricans**

The island of Puerto Rico is located between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, about 1,000 miles southeast of Miami, Florida (Serra, 1997). Racially, Puerto Ricans are a mixture of Taino Indian, Spanish, and African. Spanish is the primary language and Catholicism is the principal religion. Culturally, Puerto Ricans have strong family values and they cherish social support networks from families and neighbors. Puerto Ricans have traditional family expectations that are referred to as machismo and Marianismo, which refer to gender-related behavior. According to Amber & Alvarez (1992), machismo mandates that males demonstrate brave, exuberant, behavior and they should be dominant over women; Marianismo dictates that women are expected to be submissive, passive, self-less, and home-centered. Puerto Rican families reflect cultural
expectations, which are centered on sex-role related behavior: the wife is dutifully bound to the home and the bearing of children, while the husband’s greater social and sexual freedom is accepted (Ambert & Alvarez, 1992). Puerto Rican children are discouraged from being independent, and adherence to family demands are encouraged. This is unlike American children, who are raised to be self-reliant, competitive, and inquisitive.

On July 25, 1898, the United States invaded Puerto Rico. As a result, Puerto Rico became a United States territory and Puerto Ricans became citizens of the United States with full rights and responsibilities, except for the right to vote during presidential elections and the obligation to pay federal income tax. Unlike other immigrants, Puerto Ricans were the first group of newcomers to arrive to the United States as citizens. For this reason, the term migration rather than immigration is used to describe the Puerto Rican experience (Nieto, 2000).

At the time of U.S. occupation in 1898, Puerto Rican peasants owned a majority of the land that produced indigenous crops such as coffee, tobacco, and sugar (Candales, 2000). After the occupation, the island primarily produced sugar and then rapidly transformed from an agricultural to an industrial society. In 1918, Puerto Ricans began migrating to the United States in search of employment opportunities, primarily in New York City, and the largest wave of migration occurred between 1946 and 1964. Although Puerto Ricans left the motherland in search of better opportunity, they found mostly low-paying jobs, the jobs that no one else wanted, the jobs that the last immigrant group and African Americans were eager to give up as they sought other labor market opportunities that would increase their upward mobility in American Society (Candales, 2000).
Puerto Ricans who migrated to the United States experienced both economic and educational challenges that continue today. In 1992, Ambert & Figlier (1992) described Puerto Ricans who live on the mainland as: a) typically more educated than island standards; b) less educated than mainland standards; c) less educated than other Latino groups; d) underrepresented in high schools and colleges; e) typically employed as service workers, operatives, and manual laborers; f) more consistently under or unemployed than Whites; and e) are typically victims of downward mobility. Fifteen years later, the Pew Hispanic Center (2009) described Puerto Ricans as having lower levels of education and lower incomes than average for the U.S. population, are less likely to be in the labor force, and the rate of homeownership among Puerto Ricans is lower than the rate for both Hispanics and the overall U.S. population. Because economic wellbeing is related to educational attainment, it appears that there is a great need to address the educational challenges facing Puerto Ricans today. One way to address this need is to explore factors related to the educational persistence and departure of Puerto Rican college students.

**Persistence/Retention and Dropout/Attrition**

In discussing issues related to college student persistence and departure, it is helpful to clarify these and related terms. According to Hagedorn (2005), “one of the most widely used dichotomous measures in education research and practice is retention and dropout…retention is staying in school until completion of a degree and dropping out is leaving school prematurely” (p. 91). Concerning the distinction between persistence and retention, Hagedorn (2005) further explains that although the words persistence and
retention are often used in interchangeably, the term retention is an institutional measure, whereas persistence is a student measure: institutions retain and students persist.

Another institutionally related term is the word attrition, which is often used interchangeably with the term “dropout”. Hagedorn (2005) clarifies that attrition is the diminution in numbers of students as they leave school. Hence, when discussing phenomena related to why students leave school prematurely, the term “dropout” is often use. However, early pioneers in student retention research such as Tinto (1985) disagree with the use of the term dropout because of its negative connotation and because the term is often misused. Tinto uses the term “student departure” in place of “dropout”. I consider the term dropout a stigmatizing word, therefore I will use the term “departure” in its place unless I am citing an author directly.

**Latino Barriers to College Enrollment**

Many researchers discuss college attendance in terms of persistence and departure, however this assumes that the student is enrolled in college in the first place. Often students face obstacles that prevent college enrollment or cause students to delay college attendance. One such obstacle is high school departure but some believe that for Latino’s, educational barriers present themselves prior to the high school, especially for Puerto Ricans. According to Tapia (1992), Puerto Rican students underachieve academically in nearly all grades and subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, and science and in cities like New York, almost 70% of Puerto Rican students depart before tenth grade.
Latino early education issues.

One explanation for the lower high school attainment rates of Latinos is the fact that Latinos attend preschool programs at lower rates (Belfield, 2008). This maybe because Latino parents prefer to keep their children out of pre-school programs in an effort to protect and care for them without considering that their children will eventually enter school without the benefit of these early educational experiences (Alvarez-McHatton, 2004). According to the Department of Education (“Characteristics Early Childhood Program,” n.d.), early childhood education programs include Head Start programs, preschool, nursery school, and prekindergarten. From 1991-2005, Latinos consistently enrolled their children in early childhood programs less frequently than African Americans and Whites across all years. The Department of Education (“Characteristics Early Childhood Program,” n.d.) statistics indicate that in 2005, the percentage of Latinos that enrolled their children in childhood education programs were 43%, compared to African Americans 66%, and Whites 59%.

Latino high school departure.

In 2007, the percentage of Latinos (61%) age 25 or over that had earned a high school diploma or more was less than both African Americans (80%) and Whites (87%) [Crissey, 2009]. According to Belfield (2008), “Individuals who drop out of school have on average significantly lower economic well-being over their lifetime and they also report lower health status, more criminal activity, and greater reliance on welfare.” High school attainment is especially important because a high school diploma is required for entry into college and most occupations. Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau 2005-

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2007 American Community Survey (Crissey, 2009) indicate that in the United States, individuals with less than a high school education earned $19,405, with a high school diploma earned $26,894, with some college or associates degree earned $32,874, with a bachelor’s degree earned $46,805, and with a professional or graduate degree earned $61,287. These numbers strongly suggest that there is a relationship between educational attainment and socioeconomic status; hence, it is important to explore persistence and departure factors for Latino students as early as high school.

There are a number of reasons that may explain why Latino students drop out in such high numbers. Some of those reasons according to Alvarez-McHatton (2004) include low participation in pre-school programs (already discussed), the tendency for Latinos to be segregated into poor schools, the lack of educational services for Latinos, being “left back” or retained a grade, the student’s personal factors, and issues related to self-identification. Often Latinos live in urban areas with schools that are poorly funded and lack adequate resources. Education services may also be lacking causing Latino students to be underprepared and unable to make the connection between school, career opportunities, and future income. Students that are retained have a greater tendency to depart high schools, which suggests that many Latino students may depart for this reason. According to Alvarez-McHatton (2004), Latino students are “left-back” or retained a grade more often than their White counterparts. Student personal factors include teenage pregnancy and economic factors. Finally, self-identification can also serve as a departure factor. Latino students who attend schools in the United States are expected to assimilate into the mainstream culture. Traditionally, the United States has relied heavily on
assimilation into the mainstream culture, which suggests that the host culture has superior status in language and behavior and that other cultures are inferior, other languages undesirable, and other behaviors inappropriate (Reyes, 2000). Hence, the school environment pressures students to conform to Anglo norms and attempts to strip them of their culture and language (Irizarry & Anthrop-Gonzalez, 2007). According to McHatton (2004), “the call for assimilation results in an on-going internal battle, one that has no true victor as the cost for joining the mainstream is as steep as the cost for maintaining one’s cultural identity” (p. 120). In either case, the student may experience a need to alienate themselves from either the mainstream culture or their ethnic heritage, and this sense of conflict may have a negative impact on their ability to be successful academically.

**Latino high school/college transition.**

Zalaquett (2005) identified barriers to Latino successful college enrollment, which included minimal adult supervision, misinformation, and poorly informed choices. Latino students who are first in their families to attend college often receive little guidance from their parents and minimal guidance in making educational choices; this is especially true of students from low-income families. For instance, Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee (2002) conducted a telephone survey of 1,054 Latino parents in an effort to determine if the respondents had “college knowledge”, that is, the extent that these parents knew the milestones and prerequisites needed to help their children successfully transition between high school and college. The researchers found that, “these knowledge deficits were
significantly more evident among parents with lower incomes and educational backgrounds…” (Tornatzky et. al., 2002, p. 1)

Zalaquett (2005) also identified eight factors that facilitate successful Latino college transition from high school to college: la familia (the family), value of education, responsibility toward others, sense of accomplishment, friendship, scholarship, community support, and school personnel. In a study that Zalaquett (2005) conducted, Latino students reported that family support was integral to their success in high school and their college enrollment. The students valued education and viewed education as a key to a better future and they felt a responsibility to honor their parents by pursuing an education so they could have a career. The students were proud of their academic achievement and felt that their successes had an impact on how others perceived them. Relationships with friends, especially other college students, were beneficial to a successful transition. Scholarships were identified as being integral to the college retention of the students, as was community support and support from sponsors. Finally, being positively influenced by teachers and other school personnel was listed as a factor that helped a number of Latino students successfully transition from high school to college.

**Latino Student College Departure and Persistence**

**Latino college student departure.**

The gap in the number of Latino and White college students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree is wider even than the very substantial differences in high school completion and constitutes the greatest disparity in educational outcomes between the
nation’s largest minority group and the white majority (Fry, 2004, p. v). The gap widens when the professional degree conferral of Latinos are compared to both the white majority and the second largest majority group, African Americans. In order to address this gap, it is important to study why Latino college students depart or persist.

According to Hernandez and Lopez (2004) many Latinos depart from college because they are the first in their family to attend college, they may come from low-income households where Spanish is the primary spoken language, and may be academically underprepared. Fry (2004) indicates that Latino college departure factors are related to the fact that more Latino students attend non-selective colleges and universities, compared to white students, who are more likely to attend selective colleges. Fry (2004) also stated that delayed college enrollment, greater financial responsibility for family members, and living with family while in college rather than campus housing may also be factors. In addition, being raised in a single parent family, being home alone more than 3 hours a day, having parents with only a high school diploma, having a sibling who dropped out, and having limited-English-proficiency also contribute to the college departure of some Latino students (Swail, Cabrera, and Lee, 2004). Finally, a number of authors agree that low socioeconomic status is a major departure factor for Latino students (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Swail et. al., 2004; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres & Talbot, 2000).

**Latino college persistence.**

While it is important to identify common factors that influence Latino college departure, it may be even more beneficial to identify the common characteristics or
factors possessed by, or that influence Latino students to persist in college. Researchers such as Hernandez and Lopez (2004) indicate that personal, environmental, involvement, and socio-cultural factors serve as persistence factors for Latino students.

According to Hernandez and Lopez (2004), personal factors include high school grade point average, positive self-concept, and finances. College success is often predicted based on how well a student has performed in high school, however there is little connection with a students’ academic skill and their motivation to succeed, therefore it is unwise for college admission officers to rely exclusively on grade point average. Latino students with a positive academic self-concept (belief that they can succeed in college) tend to persist, as do those students with strong family ties. The ability to finance a college education is a crucial factor related to Latino college persistence, because Latino students tend to be economically disadvantaged.

In discussing environmental factors that have an impact on Latino college persistence, Hernandez and Lopez (2004) indicate that a balanced racial environment is important stating, students will not adjust academically or socially if the racial climate makes them feel like outsiders and this can ultimately influence a student’s intent to persist.

Involvement factors include faculty-student interaction, mentorship, and participation in student organizations. Hernandez & Lopez (2004) found that having a good relationship with faculty members was an important ingredient to academic success. Mentorship increases the likelihood of persistence because mentors can provide access to
information they would have not have been privy to, particularly with first-generation Latino students.

Latino students who participate in student organizations are more likely to do well academically because such organizations provide students an opportunity to make new friends and find a caring supportive community. Other socio-cultural factors include immigrant status, ethnic identity, gender roles, community orientation, and the role of religion. Immigrant status may have an impact on Latino persistence if the student believes that there are better opportunities in the United States compared to back home. Ethnic identity refers to the extent that Latinos relate to their ethnic group of origin or choice to assimilate into the majority culture. Either way, ethnic identity may be associated with overall psychosocial identity development, which may influence their college experiences (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004).

Community orientation must be considered when examining Latino student persistence, particularly if the student is not committed to the institution they attend. A good sense of community orientation will manifest itself if the Latino student becomes involved with off-campus community organizations. The role that religion plays in the persistence of Latino students should not be overlooked because many Latinos believe in some sort of spirituality (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). Lopez (2007) states that Latino student spirituality and religion are generally entangled with family cultural ties and significantly affect the social lives of Latino students, and religious and spiritual traditions often take a priority over one’s education.
Lopez (2007) observed that although higher education institutions have increased efforts to proactively recruit, enroll, and graduate Latino students, educational disparities between Latino students and their White counterparts continue. Hence, Lopez conducted a study at a large, predominant white college. The purpose of the study was to determine the dimensions of success for graduating Latino students within that environment. Lopez found that there were eight dimensions of success: being involved, the family’s role, the role of campus leaders and mentors, embracing academics, and the desire to be successful. According to Lopez (2007), “a Latino’s worldview is comprised of many complex factors, but at the nucleus of the individual is the family” (p. 19). This suggests that the family’s role is a primary persistence factor for Latino college students.

Arellano and Padilla interviewed 30 academically successful Latino college students. In sum, the researchers found that factors related to the academic invulnerability of all the students interviewed were parental influence and encouragement, optimistic outlook, the drive to succeed, ethnicity was a source of strength, pride and support, and the students had role models and mentors (Arellano and Padilla, 1996). Most of the students stated that their academic achievement and persistence was due to their drive to succeed and a number of students indicated a strong affiliation with their Latino ethnicity. The respondents felt that their ethnicity fueled their strong sense of self-determination and made their success more satisfying. Having mentors outside of their immediate family also helped them to attain educationally.
Latina doctoral persistence and challenges.

In 2000, 1% of the total U.S. population had earned a doctorate (Bauman, 2003). Statistics show that eight years later, only 1.3% of the U.S. population 25 or older has earned a doctorate (Bell, 2009). Of the U.S. doctoral recipients who graduated between 2006 and 2007, 5% were awarded to Latinos, and a majority of those doctorates were awarded to Latinas (National Science Foundation, n.d.). It naturally follows that of the limited number of recent studies I found, most focused on Latina doctoral attainment, and those studies will be reviewed in this section.

Gonzalez (2006) interviewed 13 Latinas doctoral students about their academic socialization in order to identify positive and negative experiences that could potentially lead to doctoral success or attrition. The research participants said that their positive doctoral experiences were related to: a) their academic preparation prior to graduate school; b) institution-wide support systems, such as scholarships; c) the diversity of students, peers, and faculty; d) and, the opportunities to build communities with similar thinking students and faculty of color. Those experiences that were negative included: a) poor K-12 academic preparation, c) undesired assimilation, d) overt racism, e) cultural isolation, and f) tokenism. The women said that they experienced tokenism in the classroom because they were expected to speak for all Latinas (Gonzalez, 2006).

According to Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solorano (2006), tokenism is a form of covert marginality that many Latina’s experience when faculty and colleagues prompt them to speak on the behalf of communities of color when the topics of race and ethnicity arise. However, when discussing topics unrelated to race and ethnicity, Latinas are not
encouraged to speak. This type of marginality is especially difficult because these covert forms manifest in ways that are not typically discriminatory (Watford et al., 2006). Hence, this type of maltreatment is difficult to ameliorate.

In 2008, Fuerth studied a group of successful Latina doctoral students and she identified challenges and those factors that lead to their success. The participants shared those experiences that were challenging: a) having a lack of confidence in their abilities, b) feeling isolated, c) experiencing difficulty with time management, and d) being responsible for caring for their children. Conversely, some of those factors that lead to success included: a) family expectations, b) an innate desire to finish the program, c) feeling integrated, d) feeling competent, e) having a sense of purpose and commitment to education, f) support from mentors, role-models, faculty and family, and g) having financial assistance. One participant mentioned that it was challenging to balance her family, work, and school responsibilities.

Time management emerged as a factor in Fuerth’s study. Fuerth (2008) remarked, “If participants viewed themselves as being able to manage their time efficiently and balance their family, work, and home life, they felt less distressed” (p. 75). Conversely, those who could not achieve this balance experienced distress. Some of the participants with children relayed that it was difficult to be both a competent mother and student simultaneously. Another doctoral student was unable to obtain a graduate assistantship and was not afforded the opportunity to teach because of her family, school, and job obligations.
Family is fundamental to all life roles for Latinas/os, and due to the workloads of all doctoral students, Latinas/os often struggle to meet family expectations that are core to their cultural values. Placing group needs before those of the individual can create unique challenges for the retention of Latina/o students, causing these students to question whether the pursuit of a doctoral degree is worth being away from family and missing out on life events (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). This may me especially true for Latinas. Although socially and culturally proscribed Latina gender roles have changed, Latinas are often expected by their parents to marry and produce children. This expectation may put stress on Latina students who feel that they are not meeting cultural expectations (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). Experiencing a sense conflict between school obligations and cultural and family expectations is not unique to Latinas. Raul Ramires (2006) describes the sacrifices involved with doctoral attainment stating, “Having less time to attend cultural events, with friends and family is perhaps the greatest disadvantage…For me, being Latino means being an active part of my family, but doing so is a challenge given the demands of a Ph.D. program,” (p. 215-216).

In sum, the role of the family is an important persistence factor for Latino College students. However, because doctoral studies demand a great deal of time, the time needed to attend to school work may encroach upon the time needed to fulfill family obligations. As a result, Latinas/os may find themselves having to make difficult choices about how to budget their time. Hence, it appears that although the role of family usually supports academic success, the ability to balance family obligations with the demands of school
and other responsibilities, such as having a job, may be of critical importance to the success of Latino/a doctoral students.

**Puerto Rican College Student Departure/Persistence**

Literature specific to Puerto Rican college student departure and persistence is sparse. However, I was able to find some studies concerning Puerto Rican college students by searching the Boricua Center reference library located at Prospect College. The studies I found are outlined in this section.

In 2000, Candales studied the educational experiences of 16 Puerto Rican women community college students, in an effort to identify what motivated these students to attend. Candales found that this group of individuals maintained a strong sense of Puerto Rican identity, and they retained their Spanish language and resisted assimilation. These women experienced a new sense of self that strengthened their Puerto Rican identities, because they felt that they could now serve as role models for other Puerto Ricans that were pursuing an education. The women participants shared that they experienced above average academic success in their early school years, they valued education, and knew that their options would be limited without an education.

The Puerto Rican women that participated in Candales’ study indicated that there were three motivating factors that influenced their decision to attend community college: on-going family life circumstance, the urgency to get off welfare, and a lack of job satisfaction. A fourth motivating factor was a concern over the depressed socioeconomic status of the Puerto Rican community; they believed that education was the mechanism to address this concern (Candales, 2000). Some barriers that were mentioned included
experiencing circular migration (migrating from Puerto Rico to the United States and back again), growing up in poverty, and a lack of parental understanding about the college experience.

In 1999, Coakley examined the educational experiences of twenty Puerto Rican women who earned baccalaureate degrees in order to determine the nature of their persistence, which contributed to their academic success. Three factors were revealed. First was the role of the mother. The women participants stated that their mothers provided inspiration, encouragement, and moral guidance (Coakley, 1999). Second was the role of female friends, and third was the desire to defy the stereotype that Puerto Rican women were uneducated. They also expressed a desire to acquire financial security for themselves and their families.

Based on the responses of Coakley’s research participants, Coakley developed a composite of eight characteristics of Puerto Rican Women who succeeded academically. All of the participants: a) cited their mother or a surrogate mother figure as a role model; b) had at least one teacher during their elementary/secondary school experience praise their academic performance; c) the nuclear family protected the woman during their adolescence from elements of the street; d) the family imposed values which outweighed the peer pressure to conform during middle and early high school; e) thought that dropping out of high school, becoming pregnant or fulfilling the stereotype of a typical Puerto Rican woman who depended on welfare was not an option; f) learned early to view setbacks and failures as stepping stones to success, were not deterred by unexpected problems and felt that they were in control of their future; g) held a belief that education
is a guarantee that life will be different, that education leads to increased income and prestige, and that education creates upward mobility for the extended family; h) and had a self-defined set of values that honored family tradition yet allowed for the full engagement in the competitive world of academics.

In 2003, Otero interviewed 20 Puerto Rican community college graduates in an effort to identify factors that explained their academic persistence. Otero found that their attainment could be understood as an interaction between personal characteristics and an institutional emphasis on culture and structure of academic support (Otero, 2003). The critical personal characteristics identified were an impetus for social and economic mobility, self-efficacy, self-reliance, proactive initiation, family centeredness and positive ethnic identity. The institutional factors included positive faculty-student relationships, access to academic support services and access to student services.

In terms of the critical personal characteristic of the students interviewed, all the students recognized the relationship between higher education and increased opportunity for economic upward mobility and understood the ramifications of not attending college. Each participant believed that they were intelligent enough to complete college and believed that they were primarily responsible for managing the resources that enabled them to attain a college degree. Consistently, the participants viewed time management as a major challenge to pursing their associate’s degree. The participants indicated that family was the center of their universe and most viewed their families as a support system they depended on. The female participants indicated that they considered their
mothers to be role models. The participants strongly identified with being Latino, and this sense of ethnic identity was especially powerful among those born on the mainland.

In 1998, Baxter interviewed ten Puerto Rican college undergraduates about the reasons for their success. Baxter found that the research participants were pursuing an education in order to move up to a better social position than their parents. All of the participants had parents who watched them closely. The role of the family was extremely important for all of the participants, particularly the role of the Puerto Rican mother. The participants often said that their mothers spoke to them about education, life in general, and they constantly taught their children how to improve themselves despite their own education level. Most of the participants were bicultural, bilingual individuals who spoke English at school and Spanish at home. Finally, the participants felt that a combination of family background, encouragement from their teachers and or/parents, along with their ability to function in both the American and Latino cultures, with hard work, persistence, discipline, and organization, all lead to academic success (Baxter, 1998).

In 1997, Serra interviewed eight doctoral students attending Pennsylvania State University. Serra concluded that the students perceived themselves as minorities in the White majority Penn State culture, and most had experienced some form of discrimination. The students relied on their families for support because of limited support from the Penn State community. Despite cultural and language barriers, most Puerto Rican students complete their degrees due to their own sense of motivation and the informal social networks that they form.
Among the reasons why Puerto Rican graduate students succeed at Penn State University are their desire to succeed, the prestige of the University, and their support networks. The students were highly motivated to succeed, which helped them to deal with various hardships and stressors. The participants also stated that they were motivated to pursue a degree at Penn State because of the institution’s prestige, which translated into increase future opportunities. Lastly, the student participants said that they were able to succeed because of the social networks that they formed. These networks provided a means to meet and socialize with new people and helped alleviate feelings of homesickness (Serra, 1997).

**College Departure and Persistence in General**

For the general population of college students, factors that influence the decision to depart or persist are as vast as the related literature. Writers such as Tinto, Bean, and Noel are well known for their books and articles about college departure and persistence that were written in the 1980’s until current times. Because these authors are often cited, I will begin this section of the literature review with a discussion of some of their classic ideas, which will be followed by a review of more contemporary literature.

**College departure in general.**

According to Noel (1985), “dropping out of college is a complex decision that is nearly always the result of a combination of factors” (p. 10). Hence, there is a plethora of literature identifying reasons why students drop out (depart) or causes for attrition. Noel (1985) identified a number of major themes related to college attrition or why students, in his terms “drop out”: academic boredom, uncertainty about what to study,
transition/adjustment problems, unrealistic expectations of college, academic under-preparedness, incompatibility, and irrelevancy. According to Noel, academic boredom can set in when students are undecided about their career goals because learning then becomes irrelevant; uncertainty about what to study is the most frequent reason why students drop out of college.

Noel (1985) further states that some students drop out because they have difficulties transitioning from high school to college, because they find themselves suddenly in a new environment. In addition, unrealistic goals can be a reason that first-generation college students dropout, particularly low-income students coming out of high school without having the benefit of a parent or sibling that has gone to college. This theme is consistent with Havighurst’s discussion of factors that motivate college students; one factor is the student’s ability to identify with a person who has gone to college. In a classic study that Havighurst (1960) conducted, it was found that those who were most desirous of going to college had parents or close relatives or teachers and other “significant persons” who had gone to college or had urged them to go to college. Unfortunately, low-income students often do not have this support. According to Valverde (1985), low-income students are often children of parents who have relatively little education; they are usually the first members of their families to attend college. Conversely, in the higher socioeconomic groups, parents are likely to have attended college and value a college education; more of the students friends plan to go to college; information on college opportunities and benefits is more readily available; and there are
simply more college educated people in the immediate environment with whom students can identify and from whom they can learn about college (Anderson, 1985).

In addition, Noel (1985) states that academic unpreparedness is another reason that students drop out of college. Moore and Carpenter (1985) expound that some dimensions of academic unpreparedness can include erratic academic performance in both high school and as college freshmen, and unimpressive standardized test scores. Erratic academic performance can result in low high school GPA. Astin and Oseguera (2005) stated that “the pre-college characteristic that carries the most weight in estimating the student’s chances of completing college is the high school GPA (p. 256).” Therefore, the academic preparedness of college students in general is of great importance to their academic success.

Incompatibility between the student and the chosen institution can cause college students to drop out. According to Noel (1985), “retention begins with recruitment, with a good match between what the institution has to offer and what the student needs (p.14).” The final college dropout theme that Noel discusses is irrelevancy. Noel states that this occurs when course content is unrelated to course requirements, educational outcomes, or the functioning of adult roles.

Tinto is well known for developing the Student Integration Model, a theory explaining the process that motivates students to leave colleges before graduating. Basically, the theory hypothesizes that persistence is a function of the match between an individual’s motivation and academic ability and the institutions academic and social characteristics (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). Unlike Noel, Tinto prefers
to refer to college withdrawal as “student departure” rather than “dropout”. According to Tinto (1985), “not all forms of student departure deserve the label ‘dropout’ because there are many forms of student departure in higher education (p. 28).”

Tinto states the student departure can be voluntary or involuntary in nature. Involuntary departure usually takes the form of academic dismissal, however 85% percent of student institutional departures are voluntary (Tinto, 1985). There are also individual and institutional attributes associated with college departure. Two individual attributes are intentions and student commitments toward the institution attended.

Student intentions may vary and may or may not include completing a degree program. Tinto (1985) states that, “to label such departures as ‘dropout’, and representing a form of failure, is both inaccurate and misleading (p. 33).” Furthermore, student commitment to the institution where they attend college may have an impact on student departure. A lack of institutional commitment may occur based on the student’s experience, perhaps negative, while at the institution. In this case, student departure would result not because of lack of intent or goal setting, but because of an absence of institutional commitment. According to Tinto (1985), “evidence mounts that experiences that promote students’ social and intellectual integration into the communities of the college are likely to strengthen their commitment and therefore reinforce persistence” (p. 35).

On the institutional level, four forms of student experience can have an impact on departure: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation. Similar to Noel’s theme of transition/adjustment problems as a reason for student departure, Tinto (1997) states that
“persistence in college requires individuals to adjust, both socially and intellectually, to the new and sometimes quite strange world of college” (p. 45). Difficulty becomes a reason for departure when students are unable to meet the academic demands of college and chose to withdraw voluntarily to avoid the stigma of failure. Incongruence, similar to Noel’s theme of incompatibility, refers to a mismatch or lack of fit between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution. A lack of integration would result in the student’s decision that further attendance would not be in his/her own best interests. Finally, departure may arise when there is insufficient contact between the student and other members of social and academic community. According to Tinto (1997), “research demonstrates that the degree and quality of personal interaction with other members of the institution are critical elements in the process of student persistence” (p. 56).

**College persistence in general.**

Although Tinto’s research focuses mainly on student departure, Tinto has also written about why students persist. According to Tinto, some types of personal/institutional interaction among college students that can result in academic persistence include building supportive peer groups, shared learning, and participating in the construction of knowledge. Tinto states that when students build supportive peer groups (learning communities), they share learning experiences that can bridge the social divide. In addition, when students participate in the construction of knowledge with faculty, they gain a sense of personal involvement, learning becomes richer, and the experience empowers some students.
Bean (2005) lists nine themes denoting why college students persist: intentions, institutional fit and commitment, psychological processes and key attitudes, academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, the external environment, the student’s background, and finances. Bean’s model of student persistence is known as the Student Attrition Model. Although Bean lists intentions as a theme related to college student persistence, Bean claims that intentions have little value by themselves; they predict which students leave, but do not explain why. Bean contends that student intention may be a by-product of interaction among other variables that have an impact on academic persistence. Bean indicates that institutional fit is more closely associated with a college student’s intent to stay or leave because students who have a sense of belonging to the college they attend, and feel satisfied with being a student and will tend to persist educationally (Bean uses the word retain).

When Bean refers to psychological process and key attitudes as themes to student persistence, he is referring to student self-efficacy. When students feel they can achieve academic goals, they become self-confident. According to Bean (2005), personal accomplishments and feedback about academic success increases a student’s self-efficacy, and in a cyclical fashion, an increase in self-efficacy raises educational goals and likelihood of persistence.

Bean indicates that academics have been overestimated in past literature as a factor in persistence. According to Bean, academics should not be underestimated, but it is only one factor in the cycle of student self-efficacy that is tied to the student’s sense of institutional commitment. As previously stated, a student’s sense of institutional
commitment will be related to how well a student socializes with others inside and outside of the institution. With institutional commitments being a key theme to student persistence, one factor that can serve as a deterrent to that sense of commitment are negative student experiences with an institution’s bureaucratic process. Students who feel trapped by unreasonable rules will “want out” (Bean, 2005).

The relationship between a student’s background and persistence refers to a combination of the student’s human capital (innate academic ability), social capital (social connections that have to do with who the student’s parents are) and goodness of fit between the student and the institution. When these three factors are favorable, the chance of student persistence increases. In terms of money and finances being a reason for persistence or departure, Bean (2005) states that, “running out of money is probably the best excuse for leaving college that there is” (p. 234). Bean (2005) also found that students who attend college part-time and work full-time, have lower retention rates and students who work to make money for college (less than 20 hours per week) are likely to be more motivated to complete college than students who earn money to maintain their lifestyles.

A student’s external environment can have an impact on student persistence. External environment refers to those factors beyond the students control or the control of the institution that cause students to leave. This can include family responsibilities. Bean (2005) explains that students can be attracted to other roles, which require that they leave their current institution:
Family responsibilities, such as raising children or taking care of a sick or aging parent, can take precedence over academic pursuits. If these are short-term arrangements, the student may stop out to take care of them and then return to school. For younger students, it may be their parent’s family that is of concern, while for older students, it can be issues related to children, a spouse, or parents. Students who are married to someone who is employed might leave school when their spouse is transferred or finds another job. (Bean, p. 232)

Authors Cabrera, Burkum, and Nasa (2005), agree with Bean; they indicated that being a parent can interfere with college attendance; they state that “having children while attending college has been identified as another risk factor for persisting in college to degree completion…incurring parental responsibilities while pursuing a college degree hampers one’s chances of degree completions by 22 percent” (p. 185-191).

**Doctoral persistence in general.**

In order to gain a broad perspective of those factors related to the success of Latino and Puerto Rican doctoral students, I reviewed the literature related to the success factors of graduate and doctoral students in general. I found that a majority the literature either studied doctoral students or often include doctoral students in their graduate samples. Hence, this section will consist of a review of the current literature concerning doctoral student persistence, departure, and attrition factors.

Dorn & Papalewis (1997) conducted a study consisting of 108 doctoral students from eight different universities and found that cohesiveness and peer mentoring were beneficial to doctoral students. In sum, the study indicated that groups who felt
committed to each other were more likely to meet group goals, such as earning a doctorate. The data showed: a) cohesiveness lead to group commitment, and to the accomplishment of goals related to the group, such as attaining a doctorate; b) students felt a positive relationship between cohesiveness and doctoral persistence; c) peer mentors provided the needed support, encouragement, and motivation; d) belonging to a doctoral group was a vital aspect that encouraged students to remain in their programs and to make progress toward their degrees; e) the social and collaborative aspects of group work have been found to be equally as important to the tasks; f) cohorts develop a collective personality with caring members encouraging persistence in the doctoral program; and g) the collaboration that first develops in the doctoral program, expands as cohorts graduate and disperse into the global workforce (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997). In sum, the researchers found that doctoral cohorts provided vital support to those members working full-time, and maintaining their personal commitments as they earned their doctorates.

In September 2009, Council of Graduate Schools (n.d.) published a study as part of the Ph.D. Completion Project based on surveys of 1,856 individuals pursing their doctoral degrees (1,406 completed and 59 withdrew). A majority of the respondents said the financial support was a main factor that contributed to their ability to complete their doctoral program. The respondents also indicated that mentoring/advising and family support was a major factor in their ability to complete their degree.

Barnett (2008) conducted a study in order to “create highly contextualized portraits of doctoral students and glean from them factors influential on their persistence”
Barnett interviewed 14 individuals who completed their doctorate and 14 individuals who had not; note that doctoral students who have completed all but their dissertation are often referred to as ABD. The demographics reported by both groups were similar in that most were approximately 40 years old, were married, worked full-time, and a number of them had children. The data showed that degree completers encountered four forms of academic integration: a) they had positive research experiences; b) completers found a compatible, congenial academic advisor; c) they had a clear research agenda that provided them with a focused research goal, and; d) degree completers said that fellowships or assistantships provided active participation in their academic departments (Barnett, 2008). Conversely, the ABD participants reported that they encountered negative departmental experiences, had an incompatible academic advisor, and lacked a clear research agenda.

In addition, Barnett’s study showed that degree completers successfully became members of a social network of peers in their institutions and departments. In contrast, the ABD participants were isolated from peers and avoided social integration that restrained their progress toward degree completion. Finally, the degree completers in Barnett’s study reported that they were able to successfully negotiate external obligations. Barnett (2008) describes external obligations as “roles doctoral students are responsible for executing related to family, work, or other obligations during their program of study that are not directly associated with the pursuit of their degree” (p. 165). Degree completers indicated that they negotiated their family and work role with others, which allowed them to focus attention on their programs. In addition, their families placed high
demands on them for program completion. However, the ABD participants indicated that financial concerns, responsibilities related to their family roles and employment duties superseded their program obligations.

Yeager (2008) conducted a research study in order to explore factors that inhibited or enabled non-traditional age men in the dissertation process. Yeager conducted case studies of six doctoral degree completers and six ABD, or non-completer participants. All of the degree completers stated that not interrupting the dissertation process was imperative. They also expressed the importance of having an avenue of stress relief for students working full-time. None of the degree completers indicated that their family obligations or finances for the Ph.D. program presented inhibiting factors, and they had no difficulty working on their dissertations in a non-structured environment. Finally, degree completers had no problem selecting a dissertation topic, and they had no problems with perfectionism or procrastination.

In contrast, the ABD participants reported several factors that inhibited their ability to complete their dissertations. The ABD’s that advanced their careers while working on their dissertations indicated that being promoted inhibited their progress because they had less free time due to increased job responsibilities. The ABD participants also cited as an inhibiting factor a lack of connection between their job and their dissertation topic, they had difficulty choosing a dissertation topic, and they preferred the structure of the classroom.
**Doctoral attrition in general.**

Golde (2005) states that, “at least 40% of the students who begin a doctoral program fail to complete it” (p. 696). In order to better understand why, Golde interviewed 58 individuals from four institutions who did not complete their doctoral programs. Golde’s study revealed that the main reason for attrition for this group of participants was because the student goals did not fit with the conventional ways of being a researcher or a scholar as portrayed by the department they were in; this caused the students to feel isolated. Other reasons for not completing their degrees included: a) being academically underprepared, b) a mismatch between the advisor and the student, c) the student perceived that research university faculty life was not for them, and d) the projected job market in their field of study was not favorable.

In another recent study, Lott, Gardner, & Powers (2009), analyzed the doctoral attrition for 3,614 individuals in 56 STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields over a 15-year period. The study showed that: a) the odds for student attrition are greatest in their first year of study, b) students who were under the age of 25 when they started their program were more likely to depart than those who entered between the ages of 25-29, c) women and students of color who were surrounded by others who were like them tended to persist, d) and married students were less likely to depart than unmarried students.

In sum, there are various reasons why the general population of college and doctoral students persist or depart. The literature indicates that having mentors and family support are common persistence factors for both Latino and the general population of
college and doctoral students. However, the inability to balance family, work and school demands seems to be a common departure factor. Because the Latino culture emphasizes the importance of family, the ability to balance the associated social roles and school appears to be critical to the success of Latino college students, doctoral students especially. Therefore, the concepts of social roles and social role balance will be explored in greater detail in the next section.

**Havighurst’s Social Roles Literature**

A number of authors such as Cabrera, Burkim, Nasa (2005), and Bean (2005), agree that taking on multiple social responsibilities in conjunction with attending college can serve as risk factor for persisting in college. Therefore, I will explore this factor in greater detail. Because a discussion about social roles assumes the validity of the concept, this section will begin with a review of Robert J. Havighurst’s seminal research about social roles.

One of the early pioneers in the study of adult development was Robert Havighurst, a developmental psychologist at the University of Chicago (James, Witte, Galbraith, 2006). Havighurst is well known for having conducted the Kansas City Study of Adult Life, which was established by the University of Chicago’s Committee on Human Development and Community Studies. Havighurst began the study with some ideas about significant social roles and the activity they consisted of. Believing that the concept of “social roles” was nebulous, Havighurst sought to give the concept concrete meaning.
Havighurst and Orr (1956) recognized that the social expectations which impinge upon an adult in modern society may be described in a limited number of areas of behavior as follows: parent, spouse, child of aging parent, home-maker (male or female), worker, user of leisure, church member, club or association member, citizen and friend. Each role carries with it socially defined behaviors that each individual is expected to fill along with developmental tasks. Havighurst (1973) indicated that, “a developmental task is midway between an individual need and a societal demand” (p. 332).

An individual’s performance of a task could be rated high or low depending on that person’s level of energy expenditure on a given task. A study of performance on developmental tasks was made as part of the Kansas City of Adult Life. When the performance ratings of the developmental tasks were studied, the results showed little or no difference between genders, a few differences between the older and younger members of the sample, and many differences according to socio-economic status. The outcome of the study showed that it appeared the upper-middle class people generally meet the expectations of our society better than groups below them in the social scale from lower-lower class to upper-middle class (Havighurst & Orr, 1956).

This study established a connection between social roles and the planning of adult education. Havighurst believed that there are teachable moments, which come with great urgency when a person’s motivation to learn is extremely intense. Changes in social roles and their accompanying tasks can also provide “teachable moments” for adults (Merriam & Mullins, 1981). During these times, education is extremely effective. If a person has a
conscious need to improve him or herself or if there is some social need, the best opportunity for adult education will present itself.

Havighurst’s research on social roles also brought to light the function of adult education to personal competence. Havighurst (1970) stated that to perform adult roles competently in the midst of rapid social change requires that a person study his way through adulthood. According to Havighurst (1956), “adult education, in this mood, is a businesslike affair of providing the situation in which the adult goes on learning things which make him a more competent worker, parent, spouse, and homemaker…Soon he enters these roles in earnest and tries to fill them in ways which are satisfying to him and society” (p. 69).

Since Havighurst’s seminal research of the concept of social roles, other researchers have sought to update his concepts. According to James, Witte, and Gallbraith (2006), “one impetus for further research into social roles was whether there had been a shift in motivating forces influencing social roles over the 50 years since Havighurst conducted his research studies, a second, to determine whether Havighurst’s studies maintained relevance over time” (p. 53-54). Researchers such as Witte, Guarino and James (2001) felt that social roles and the foundations upon which they were developed had undergone considerable change since Havighurst’s explorations in the 1950s. According to Gallbraith and James (2002), “changing societal norms and expectations, rapid advances in information systems, the increased role of women and minorities in the workplace, global interdependency, and the worldwide economic
realities of current life have created a need for revitalizing Havighurst’s social role concept” (p. 523).

Hence, a number Havighurst social role related research studies have been conducted at the University of South Florida (USF) by the USF Social Role Research Group from 1986 to 2009. This research has served to validate the concept of social roles and has helped to establish the relationship between social roles and adult education. Adult educators have used this research in order to help plan educational programs for adults based on the characteristics and needs of contemporary adult learners.

Social Role Strain

Social roles are socially defined behaviors that each individual is expected to fill and these expectations may be described as behavior associated with being a parent, spouse, or worker. Social role strain is experienced when an individual experiences difficulty in meeting social role demands (Goode, 1960). Briefly stated, some components of social role strain include role conflict (simultaneous, incompatible demands), role overload (insufficient time to meet demands), and role contagion (preoccupation with one role while performing another) (Home, 1997).

There have been some studies that have identified sources of role strain for adult students. In 2005, Fenton conducted a study in order to explore adult community college students’ multiple role experiences. The purpose of the study was to understand how adult learners balance their social role demands with respect to pursuing their education (Fenton, 2005). Using Havighurt’s social roles as a conceptual framework, Fenton conducted a qualitative study on how eight adult students persisted in college while
balancing the social roles of parent, spouse/partner, worker, and learner. Specifically, Fenton sought to explore how this group of adults described their experience of being an adult learner balancing multiple social roles. Fenton also wanted to determine if males and females had different experiences balancing multiple roles, and what institutional support participants reported as helpful at the community college. The results of Fenton’s (2005) study indicated that although adult learners found it challenging to balance multiple roles and experienced many levels of stress that impacted other roles, dropping out was never perceived as an option; instead the students relied on their ability to prioritize and organize the many demands on their time and energy. (p. vii)

Fenton’s study was one of the few that I found that examined the perceptions of adult students on their motivation to persist academically, while successfully fulfilling their other social role obligations. According to Fenton (2005), “Adult students are challenged to integrate educational goals and their lives as multiple roles compete for student time and may contribute to non-persistence in pursuing academic goals” (p. 39). Hence, it is important to identify those factors that contribute to or that ameliorate an adult student’s sense of role strain.

Home conducted a study of 443 women enrolled in social work, nursing, or adult education programs. Home observed that although women are increasingly involved in education and in the workplace, women are still primarily responsible for their families, and combining higher education and family is especially problematic because both are “greedy” institutions that demand exclusive loyalty, virtually unlimited time commitments, and high flexibility (Home, 1997). Home found that women students with
lower incomes and higher perceived role demands had more stress and role strain and those students that were participating in distance education and had strong support from their families had less.

Giancola, Grawich, and Borchert (2009) noted that an area of particular salience for adult students is the stress of balancing the multiple demands of roles at work, at school, and in their personal lives; with an increase in nontraditional students attending college, there is a need to understand how work/life stress affects adult students. The researchers surveyed 159 adult students who were attending classes during weeknights, Saturdays, and on-line. The findings suggested that work may be the greatest source of stress for the adult student because of the integral role that work plays in their lives, and because of the three domains, personal, work, and school, students may have the least control over their work situation. The researchers also found that garnering support from one’s family and ensuring that school does not interfere with work may be key to alleviating an adult student’s stress.

**Social role strain and Latinos.**

Often Latinos subscribe to the conventional Latino value of *familismo*. Hence, Latino college students may be especially vulnerable to social role strain because in contrast to the values of individuality and independence emphasized in the U.S. culture, *familismo* requires an individual family member to put the needs of the family first, even if it means making personal sacrifices (Sy & Romero, 2008). It is well documented that close family ties is an educational facilitator for college students in general, especially for Latinos. However, a student’s perception of close family ties is not the same as the
obligations they actually have to fill. Hence, although valuing close family connections could be a protective factor, the conflicting demands from multiple contexts also could increase stress and compromise academic outcomes (Sy & Romero, 2008). For instance, Sy (2006) conducted a study that suggested that Latina students who spent more time with family experienced low school stress and higher academic achievement. However, those Latina students who were obligated to engage in frequent language brokering for their parents experienced higher school stress.

In 2008, Sy and Romero conducted a study in order to identify family responsibilities among Latina college students from immigrant families and how they balanced multiple roles. The researchers interviewed 20 Latina college students and three main themes emerged. These Latinas stated that they became self-sufficient in order to help their families. They contributed financially by covering their own expenses, and any financial contributions they made were voluntary. For these Latina students, there was variation in family obligations based on birth order and their parents’ marital status: being an older sibling from a single-parent home meant more responsibility (Sy & Romero, 2008).

**Summary**

The literature review for this study began with an overview of statistical data from the U.S. Census Bureau that indicates that Latinos are currently the largest minority group in the United States with a population that is expected to increase by 60% in the future (Passel & Cohn, 2008). The educational outcomes for Latinos were discussed based on statistical data from the U.S. Department of Education, which show that Latinos
have consistently lagged behind Whites and African Americans in educational attainment and that this educational disparity increases as the level of degree rises. There was a brief discussion about the diversity of Latinos followed by a description of the second largest minority group in the United States, Puerto Ricans. The history of Puerto Rican migration to the United States was discussed, as was Puerto Rican culture, and statistical data showing that Puerto Ricans have struggled educationally and economically.

This literature review clarified the terms educational persistence/retention and school dropout/attrition. There was then a review of studies pertaining to Latino college enrollment obstacles, Latino early education, Latino and Puerto Rican educational persistence and departure, and there was discussion about educational persistence/departure factors of college students in general. Finally, the impact of social roles strain was reviewed as a possible obstacle to college persistence for adult students, Latinas especially.

Doctoral degree attainment for Latinos is uncommon. Therefore, it naturally follows that there is a paucity of literature that describes the success factors of Puerto Rican doctoral students as they navigate their path to doctoral attainment. In order to address this gap in the literature, I conducted a descriptive qualitative study that employed a phenomenological research approach to describe the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education. I will describe my methods in chapter three.
Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to describe and explain the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education. In order to achieve a deep level of understanding, I sought to capture the success stories of my research participants by administering two face-to-face interviews with them, which were conducted in February and March 2010. I also maintained an open-line of communication with the participants by e-mail and telephone before and after that. The exploratory research questions that guided my study were:

1. What are the components of their perspectives?
2. What social-cultural variables influence their perspectives?

In order to answer the research questions, I used a triangulated set of research methods for data collection that included the analysis of books and articles, reflective journal entries, multiple interviews, and theme validation.

Qualitative Approach: Phenomenology

This was a descriptive qualitative study that employed a phenomenological research approach in order to describe the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education. I chose a descriptive qualitative design because the purpose of the research was to describe and explain the lived experiences of Puerto Rican doctoral
graduates as a phenomenon. I also chose this design because it allowed me to capture the participants’ stories during the interview process, a method common in qualitative research designs.

Phenomenology is one type of qualitative research approach that seeks to assign meaning to phenomena. The lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research, and what characterizes phenomenology is that it begins in the lived world (Van Manen, 1990). According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), “phenomenology is the study of the world as it appears to individuals when they lay aside the prevailing understanding of those phenomena and revisit their immediate experiences for the phenomena” (p. 495). This is also referred to as “bracketing”. Moustakas (1994) states that, “the aim of phenomenology is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13). Because people make sense of their world as filtered through the lens of their own lived experiences (Janesick, 2004), phenomenology is an appropriate research method when the purpose of the research study is to understand the experience of individuals with a phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) poignantly explains the benefit of exploring phenomena through the experiences of others stating, “We gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experience ourselves” (p. 62). A researcher explores phenomena by collecting data from individuals who have experienced it. The researcher then mines the data for meaning and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience, which is reduced to a universal description
of the phenomenon by analyzing text, such as documents and transcripts, provided to the researcher by the individual who experienced the phenomenon.

This type of text analysis is referred to hermeneutics, which is an interpretation of experience via text. Van Manen makes the distinction between phenomenology and hermeneutics, but often uses the words interchangeably and in combination. According to Van Manen (1990), “phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the ‘text’ of life, and semiotics is used here to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics” (p. 4). Van Manen (1990) refers to hermeneutic phenomenology as research that is fundamentally a writing activity, and he states that research and writing are aspects of one process. During the course of this study, I collected a variety of data from the research participants that included text from books, articles and transcripts. I then mined this data for meaning in order to develop a rich and universal description of the perspectives of the Puerto Rican doctoral graduates.

Method of Data Collection

Pilot study.

Prior to committing to this research topic, I conducted a pilot study on July 9, 2009. The purpose of the pilot study was to ensure that the research questions would elicit data relevant to my topic of study. I also sought to test the effectiveness of the interview protocol that I might use, and the pilot study also served as “background work” for the study or a “stretching exercise” for me to become a more competent qualitative researcher. According to Janesick (2000), a pilot study or “stretching exercise” allows
prospective qualitative researchers to practice interviewing, observing, and writing, to refine their instruments, which are the researcher’s themselves. I achieved all three purposes and experienced additional benefits, which I will elucidate here.

The pilot study consisted of a 50-minute interview with the research participant, Martha, who stated that she was, “glad that she had the opportunity to share and she hoped that her story would motivate others.” Martha stated toward the end of the interview, “…your stories are what…will motivate other people, and that’s important. I think we need to keep bringing forth the stories of people that have been successfully so that other people can be successful too.” Martha’s parting comment confirmed and validated the researcher’s purpose for conducting this study.

After the interview, I transcribed the recording and sent Martha a copy for a member check. Martha validated the transcript and then I analyzed the data using a computer software program called Atlas.ti. Using Atlas.ti enabled me to easily identify, extract, and organize codes, categories, and themes from Martha’s interview transcript or “text”. This process resulted in the identification of two overarching themes from Martha’s interview about her doctoral attainment experience:

1. Those things that served as educational facilitators, and
2. Those things that were educational obstacles.

In sum, the pilot study validated the dissertation topic and interview protocol, the two main reasons that I conducted the pilot study in the first place. Based on the analysis of Martha’s transcript, the overarching themes that emerged from the conversation were those things that Martha described and explained to be either Educational Facilitators or
Obstacles, which included a discussion about social roles, social role strain, and social role balance. In sum, it appeared that the themes that emerged during the pilot study were consistent with the topics covered in this study’s literature review: a) Latino/a academic persistence (educational facilitator theme), b) Latino academic departure (educational obstacle theme), and c) social roles.

The third reason that I conducted the pilot study was to have it serve as a “stretching exercise” for me. I did not anticipate the benefits of doing this. First, the pilot study allowed me to present myself as a researcher pursing her doctorate, which helped me to become comfortable with my role during the interview. After the interview, I experienced parts of the research process for the first time. I conducted a number of interviews during my course work, but the activity did not go beyond the interview and transcription process. For the pilot study, I conducted a member check, which included a request for feedback about the interview. Based on the feedback, I decided not to change Interview Protocol A. In sum, the pilot study experience allowed me to develop a basic template of the interview and analysis process, which was a very confidence building experience.

**Purposive snowball sample.**

According to Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh (1996), “Qualitative researchers cannot observe everything that might be relevant to the research problem, so they try to obtain a sample of observations believed to be representative of everything that they could observe”( p. 480). Qualitative researchers select purposive samples in an effort to understand what they are studying and to ensure that certain types of individuals or
persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study (Berg, 2007). Snowball samples are a subset of purposive samples. Snowball samples are so named because one picks up the sample along the way. This is analogous to a snowball accumulating snow (Types of samples, n.d.). In this method, participants with whom contact has been made use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially contribute to the study (Family Health International, 2010). Snowball sampling is especially useful when you are trying to reach populations that are inaccessible or hard to reach (Trochim, 2006). The purposive sample of individuals that I interviewed for this study was located by using the “snowball” method as describe above.

The sample of individuals who initially agreed to be interviewed consisted of nine individuals of Puerto Rican ethnicity who attended a doctoral program in the United States, and who were currently or formally faculty within the Gotham education system in state of New York. One individual withdrew from the study prior to being interviewed, which left me with a sample of eight. The sample included both men and women, since I anticipated that gender could potentially influence how the participants prioritize their time. I conducted the interviews in February and March 2010.

As discussed previously, one of the limitations of this study was the lack of representativeness of the sample of individuals that I interviewed. This lack of representativeness occurred because of the difficulty I had in locating individuals to interview that met the criteria for the study (Puerto Ricans with doctorates). Base on my literature review, I knew that only 1.5% of the overall population had earned a doctorate,
and only 5% of those degrees had been earned by Latinos. Hence, finding a sample of individuals to interview for this study was a stumbling block that I anticipated.

I started to search for potential research participants by word of mouth in the summer of 2009. When that failed, I resorted to searching for participants by internet. I attempted to contact Latino social clubs at major universities throughout the state of Florida. When that did not work, I targeted faculty members at Florida Universities and throughout the east coast of the United States, using public directories, searching by possible Puerto Rican surnames (such as Rivera, Perez, Hernandez, Rosario ect.)

By the fall of 2009, I had located four participants who agreed to be interviewed. One individual resided in Florida, one in North Carolina, and two in New York. It is interesting that I found the two New York participants during the process of conducting the literature review for this study. The two authored one of only a handful of books specifically about Puerto Ricans and educational issues that I located at the U.S.F. library. According to the author’s description in the book, both of the authors lived in New York and were GOTHAM faculty. I e-mailed both of the authors and one of them responded. Not only did this one individual, Angelica, agree to participate in this study, she put me in touch with other potential participants (including her sister and co-author) who were faculty within the GOTHAM system at colleges such as Canarsie, Broadway, Prospect, Justice, and Big Metropolis Community Colleges.

The potential research participants that Angelica pointed me to were all Puerto Ricans with doctorates who worked within the GOTHAM system, either for the OPENGATE program or Boricua Center at Prospect College. From this one contact, I
was able to find 8 of the 9 individuals who initially agreed to participate in my study. I found one former faculty member on my own using the on-line GOTHAM faculty directory.

According to Creswell (2007), an appropriate sample size for a phenomenological study should range from three to ten participants. Because I was able to find a sample of 9 potential participants within close proximity to Manhattan, New York, I decided to delimit the study to New York faculty only. I also thought that the results would be more meaningful this way because I knew that all of the participants shared at least two common threads: they all resided in New York, and they all had a professional relationship with the GOTHAM system.

**Collecting the data.**

My data collection experience began with an early morning U.S. Airways flight to New York City on February 21, 2010. I arrived at the New York La Guardia airport at approximately 1:30 pm and was transported to the Wellington Hotel, located in Manhattan, on 7th Avenue and 55th Street, after an adventurous shuttle bus ride through the hectic and seemingly “lane-less” roads of New York City. As a law enforcement officer, I could not help but think, “Where is a traffic cop when you need one?” Amazingly, the shuttle bus driver remained unfazed and I arrived safely at the hotel at about 3 p.m., just in time to check into my cozy hotel room. My plan was to interview nine individuals at six different locations. Five of the locations were colleges within the GOTHAM system, four in Manhattan and one in Brooklyn. The sixth location was a private residence located in Harlem. I researched several maps on-line prior to my arrival
in New York, and I decided that I would travel by subway to all of the locations. After I settled into my hotel room, I went to the nearest subway station and purchased a Metro Card containing seven days’ worth of subway fare. That night I fell asleep to the sounds of the Wellington’s clanking plumbing, honking horns from the street below, and police sirens emanating from the City that never sleeps. The next day, I purchased a set of earplugs.

Because of the anticipated cost of the airfare, food, and lodging, I planned two trips to New York that would extend five days each. Sunday was a travel day, which gave me four business days to successively conduct the nine interviews that I had confirmed prior to my first trip to New York in February 2010.

For the first trip, I scheduled three interviews on Monday, at three separate locations. I scheduled three interviews on Tuesday, all at the same location, one interview on Wednesday and two interviews on Thursday, at two different locations. On Monday, February 22, 2010, I planned to interview Graciella first, at Canarsie College, at 10 am, then her sister Angelica at 3 pm, at Broadway College, in Manhattan, followed by an interview in Harlem, with Lissette at 6 pm.

Where this schedule would seem daunting to most, I had previously interviewed three to four people in one day, at multiple locations, within my capacity as a law enforcement detective. I used this sense of confidence to help get me beyond the physical exhaustion that I experience from the excessive city walking and standing that I was unaccustomed to, and mental exhaustion that I experienced from having to navigating my way through a subway system that I had become unfamiliar with. In order to help
memorialize my experiences, I purchased the highest quality pocket size digital camera that I could afford, a Kodak Z915 with a 10x zoom, and I kept the camera in my coat pocket at all times. Doing this proved to be invaluable because I returned to my room each day too exhausted to immediately write my field notes. Having pictures of where I had been helped me to recall what I had experienced during those days later on.

On Thursday, February 25, 2010, I scheduled two interviews. I woke up, looked out to the window, and was greeted by beautiful snow flurries that immediately put me in a festive mood. Christmas in February, how fortunate I was? There was snow blanketing the roof tops, but the snow appeared too wet to stick to the ground. By the time I left my room, the snowflakes became more solid and began to fall fast in a diagonal direction, and the snow began to stick to the ground. I found the snow very exciting, and I welcomed the opportunity to walk through it—until I arrived at Big Metropolis Community College (BMCC). Although I was lucky enough to be prepared with a thick coat, I was wearing a black pair of loafers on this day and I quickly began to realize the need for galoshes. To make things worse, I received a telephone call from the participant that I was supposed to interview last, at 1 pm, and he said that he was unable to make it to the interview due to the inclement weather. Hence, my participant pool went from nine to eight due to the snow. The other consequence I experienced due to the snow was having my February 26th flight back to Tampa cancelled the next morning. This increased my cost of the study by about $300 dollars because of the additional cost of food and because the cost of my hotel room went from $99 per night to $204 to stay the extra night.
Prior to ending each interview that I conducted in February, I set an appointment with each participant for their second interview in March, at approximately the same time, exactly four weeks from the date of the first interview. Although this gave me just enough time to type up the transcripts from the first interviews before conducting the second set of interviews, it was otherwise advantageous to be able to conduct the second set of interviews sequentially and within a short period of time. First, conducting the interviews sequentially helped me to retrace my steps during the second set of interviews and provided me with a logical way to introduce the participants’ data and organize their stories. Second, I think that conducting the interviews within a short period of time helped the participants to recall the contents of their first interview, and also helped strengthened the rapport between the participants and I.

**Interviewing.**

Janesick (2004) describes interviewing as an ancient technique that she defines as “a meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning” (p. 72). Hence, an interview is a mutual communication process through which qualitative researchers can obtain nuanced descriptions of the research participant’s lived experience. For this phenomenological study, I conducted qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates in an effort to describe the everyday lived world of these individuals as they experienced the doctoral process. According to Kvale (1996), “with the focus of the interview on the experienced meanings of the participants’ life world, phenomenology appears relevant for clarifying the mode of understanding in qualitative
research interviews” (p. 53). Thus, interviewing was the primary technique that I used to collect data for this study.

In order to ensure that I captured the participants’ experiences in depth, I traveled to New York and conduct two formal face-to-face interviews with each participant at a location that was convenient for them in February and March 2010. In order to develop a rapport with the participants, I opened up an informal line of communication prior to meeting with each of them. I initially contacted each one by e-mail. I follow-up on the e-mails with telephone calls to confirm their desire to participate, to exchange background information, and to allow the participant to ask me questions prior to meeting with me formally. I continued to keep in touch with the research participants after I interviewed them, both informally and formally throughout a serious of member checks that I conducted as part of this study.

I intended for each interview to last approximately 50 minutes each. For the first set of interviews, the time I spent interviewing ranged from 1 hr 51 minutes to 29 minutes in length. Seven of the eight interviews were over 50 minutes long, with the average length of interview being 1 hour and 9 minutes. For the second set of interviews, the time that I spent interviewing ranged from 1 hr and 21 minutes to 13 minutes, with an average interview time of 42 minutes.

In order to guide the interviews, I developed interview Protocol A. For the first interview, each research participant was asked the same open-ended, non-directional, and overarching research questions (Creswell, 2007). Protocol A consisted of thirteen basic descriptive questions that I used in order to elicit information from the research
participants about their doctoral experience. During the first interview, I asked the participants to describe a typical day, to describe their best and worst experiences, and I asked them to describe the social and cultural influences that affected their doctoral experience. During the second interview, I asked the participants follow-up and clarification questions in order to draw out the nuances of what they told me during their first interview. I also added questions as the conversation progressed based on how the participants responded. This flexibility ensured that the stories that I recorded were as authentic and unique as were the experiences of each individual.

Most of the interviews were conducted at the participants’ offices located at the colleges where they worked. One set of interviews was conducted at an apartment located in Harlem, New York, and one interview was conducted at a Puerto Rican restaurant located in Manhattan. I started the first set of interviews by introducing myself and explaining the purpose and process of my study. I had each participant read and sign a copy of the required U.S.F. Institutional Review Board (IRB) document, which they all said that they understood. I told each participant that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

For both sets of interviews, I placed an Olympus VN-4100PC digital voice recorder on a desk or table in front of the participant, shortly after starting conversation. Based on my extensive prior experience with conducting recorded interviews, I knew that this gesture would help the participant to become desensitized to the recorder prior to it being turned on. All of the participants appeared to be comfortable having the conversation recorded.
After the interviews, I downloaded the digital voice recording to my laptop using a USB cord. I copied the recorded interview to a Compact Disc (CD), which I placed in a secure file cabinet at my home office. I gave the participants a choice to either have the recording e-mailed to them, at an e-mail address of their choosing, or having a CD given or mailed to them. Most chose to have me e-mail the files.

I then transcribed the recorded interview using an Olympus AS-2300 PC Transcription kit. As a phenomenological interviewer, I decided to transcribe the recordings myself so that I could carefully process the data as I listened to the recordings repeatedly. Transcribing the interviews myself also helped me to become closer to the data.

Each participant was given a copy of the transcription from their first interview, prior to the second interview. I encouraged the participants to review their transcripts prior to and during the second interview in order to help stimulate the memories of their doctoral experience and to ensure that I captured every possible detail. I opened the second set of interviews by going over the major categories from Protocol A and asking if the participants thought they left anything out. I also reiterated some of the questions from Protocol A using similar but different phrases. In all instances, this line of questioning resulted in conversations that were redundant to the first interview. This lead me to believe that I had reached the point of data saturation, and I was satisfied that my research questions had been answered.
Role of the researcher.

Qualitative researchers collect data from multiple sources, including interviews, documents, and observation. After the researcher collects the data, the researcher analyzes them in an effort to identify themes that cut across all of the data sources. During the research process, the researcher focuses on learning the meaning that participants hold about the research problem being explored. Because the researcher collects, analyzes, and interprets data in order to understand the phenomena under study, the researcher, in essence, is the research instrument. Janesick (2001) eloquently describes the role of the researcher in qualitative studies when she states, “…the role of the qualitative researcher is of critical importance because the researcher is the research instrument…like the artist who uses paint and brushes or the dancer who uses movement, the qualitative researcher uses many techniques as tools to ultimately tell a story” (p. 533). The role of the researcher in a qualitative study such as this one is vital. This is because the researcher plays such a central role in the process of it, a fact that became increasingly clear to me as this study progressed. Upon reflection, I realized that I had selected the topic, the research questions, I controlled the pace and momentum of the study, with some assistance, I located the research participants, and I controlled all aspects of the data collection. I came to realize that the roots of this study were buried deep within me. For this reason, I found it essential to journal my thoughts in order maintain perspective and process the data that I collected more clearly.
Researcher reflective journal.

I maintained a reflective journal during the course of this study. The journal contained reflections about why I chose the topic and sample under study. I documented my own viewpoints, judgments, and perceptions about the research topic and the research participants. Janesick (1998) explains the criticality of journaling in qualitative research by stating, “the notion of a comprehensive reflective journal to address the researcher’s self is critical in qualitative work due to the fact that the researcher is the research instrument” (p. 3). Hence, journaling helped me to better understand my role within the research. Because I am currently a doctoral student, journaling also helped me to interrogate my thinking so I could set-aside (or bracket) my prevailing understanding of the doctoral process from my own point of view of being a Puerto Rican female. In sum, documenting my thoughts and feelings in this manner enabled me to understand the doctoral experiences of my research participants with greater lucidity and ensured that I recognized any bias on my part that may have influence the research findings.

Data Analysis

I conducted two face-to-face interviews with each participant, which I tape-recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed. After I transcribed the recording, I imported the data file into Atlas-ti, a qualitative analysis software program. I used the software to sort the transcript “text” into hermeneutic or data units that I coded and categorized into themes.

According to Saldana (2009), “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or
evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). I coded each
transcript’s “text” in two Cycles. In the First Cycle, I coded the data from each transcript
using an open-ended process called Initial Coding. I used this process in order to help me
detect repetitive patterns of actions or meaning in the text that when clustered together
facilitated the development of categories. I conducted this process with each set of
transcripts for both the first and second interviews for each participant. In the Second
Cycle, I evaluated the categories developed from both sets of transcripts and I refined the
categories. The categories were coalesced and identified as emergent themes.

I employed a method called member checking, or participant verification in a
number of steps. I e-mailed each participant a copy of their transcript from each interview
and I requested that the participant e-mail me back any corrections. I also e-mailed the
participants a copy of my analysis of the data, codes, and categories to ensure that they
agreed with my interpretation and analysis of what they said. I had the analysis peer
reviewed by panel of three doctoral candidates. I asked the peer reviewers to comment on
the codes, categories, and themes that emerged during the study. In order to authentic the
findings of my study, I cross verified what the participants told me against other data
resources such as books and articles. In order to ensure transparency of the process and
procedures of this study, I conducted an audit trail and maintained a reflective journal,
which contains information about how the data were collected, how the categories were
derived, and how I made my decisions throughout the study. I also used the reflective
journal to help bracket my thoughts and feelings about the data I collected and the
participants so that I could make a clear and reasoned analysis of the data.
Credibility, Consistency, and Transferability

I employed a number of research procedures in order to ensure the credibility and consistency of the research. I described those methods in detail in previous sections. In short, I triangulated the data that I analyzed with outside sources such as books and articles. I validated the analysis by conducting a series of member checks and peer review. In order to ensure that I analyzed the data clearly, I maintained a reflective journal of my experiences with the participants, within the interview environment, and with the phenomenon being research. I also conducted an audit trail documenting the progress of the research in detail.

Regarding transferability of the research findings, it should be noted that I did not conduct this study in order to generalize the findings to other populations. Instead, consistent with the general goal of qualitative research, I conducted this research in an effort to explore the depth of meaning of the perspectives of a select group of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education. As suggested by Merriam (1988), I provided a detailed description of the study’s context in Chapter 4 so that the reader interested in transferability can understand the findings and will have enough information to form the basis for an appropriate judgment.

Ethical Issues

In compliance with University of South Florida policy, an application for Institutional Review Board approval was submitted and approved. I required all of the research participants to read and sign the appropriate release. The participants were told
that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. No ethical issues arose that needed to be addressed.

**Estimated Dissertation Timeline, Expenses, and Funding**

In order to set reasonable expectations for completion of this research study, I formulated two proposed dissertation timelines. Although I aspired to complete the study by the Spring of 2010, and graduate by Summer of 2010, Janesick (2004) states that, “whatever your target date for completion of a study, add another 6 months to give yourself a reasonable window for reflection and writing” (p. 119). With this in mind, I formulated two timelines for graduation, one for Summer 2010, and one for a Fall 2010. Considering that some faculty members are not available during the summer, I understood that a Summer 2010 completion date was ambitious and that anticipating a Fall 2010 completion date would provide for a more comfortable pace. In reality, the Fall 2010 timeline denoted what actually occurred (Table 2).

In order to ensure that I could afford to conduct this study as planned, I composed a table of estimated dissertation expenses prior to collecting the data for this study that totaled $15,000 (see Cost of Living Index, Appendix M). I correctly anticipated that the largest expense associated with completing my doctoral program was the cost of paying for the 24 required dissertation hours, which was not covered by the state tuition waiver that I used to pay for my doctoral course work. The second largest cost that I accurately anticipated was the cost of lodging and travel to New York, which cost me approximately $4,000, including having to spend an extra night in New York on February 26, 2010. In
sum, my actually doctoral expenses to date are $14,088.96: a few hundred dollars less than the $15,000 that I anticipated (Table 3).

Table 2. Dissertation Timeline Fall 2010 Graduation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completed Course Work</td>
<td>December 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed Qualification Exam</td>
<td>December 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafted Concept Paper</td>
<td>January 2009-April 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Mailed Concept Paper To Committee</td>
<td>April 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Feedback From Committee</td>
<td>April 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Approved Pilot Study</td>
<td>June 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted Pilot Study</td>
<td>July 9, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-Mouth Search for Participants</td>
<td>July 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisions from Concept Paper to Dissertation</td>
<td>June 2009-September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared for Proposal</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found Some Participants via Internet</td>
<td>November 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Proposal Pre-Defense Meetings</td>
<td>November 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal Defense Hearing and Approval</td>
<td>December 8, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Approval for Dissertation</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmed Study Participants</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Round of Interviews &amp; Transcripts</td>
<td>February 22-25, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Check of Transcript</td>
<td>March 15-19, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Round of Interview &amp; Transcripts</td>
<td>March 22-25, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Check of Transcript</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>May-June 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member Check of Analysis &amp; Profiles</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
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<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>July-August 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revise Chapters 1-3</td>
<td>July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft Chapters 4 &amp; 5</td>
<td>July-August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submitted to Committee First Dissertation Draft</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline to Register for Graduation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline to Register for ETD Submission</td>
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<td>Final Dissertation Pre-Defense Meetings</td>
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<td>Public Posting of Final Dissertation Defense</td>
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<td>Final ETD Clearance &amp; Submit to ProQuest</td>
<td>December 8, 2010</td>
</tr>
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<td>Fall Commencement</td>
<td>December 11, 2010</td>
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Table 3. Dissertation and Graduation Expenses

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<td>Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-4100PC</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympus AS-2300 PC Transcription Kit</td>
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<td>ProQuest Open Access Fee</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$14,088.96</strong></td>
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**Summary**

In sum, the purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education. In order complete the research study, I conducted nine interviews and included eight of those interviews in the final analysis. I employed a number of research procedures in order to ensure the credibility and consistency of the research. I triangulated the data that I analyzed with outside sources such as books and articles. I validated the analysis by conducting a series of member checks and peer review. In order to ensure that I analyzed the data clearly, I maintained a reflective journal of my experiences with the participants, within the interview environment, and with the phenomenon being researched. I also conducted an audit trail documenting the progress of the research in detail. I then presented the data in chapter four. Figure one depicts my dissertation process.
Figure 1. Dissertation Process
Chapter Four: Presentation of the Interview Data

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education. The questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the components of their perspectives?
2. What social-cultural variables influence their perspectives?

In order to answer the research questions, I used a triangulated set of research methods for data collection that included the analysis of books and articles, reflective journal entries, multiple interviews, and theme validation. This chapter includes a description of the research setting, the research participants, and the details of the participants’ lived experiences with the process of doctoral attainment.

The Setting

All of the eight individuals who participated in this study were affiliated with the GOTHAM educational system. Seven of the participants were GOTHAM faculty at the time that they were interviewed and one participant was a previous faculty member. Five of the participants work for the OPENGATE program, within the GOTHAM system, one individual is a full-professor at GOTHAM. Two of the participants were affiliated with Boricua Center, one currently, and one previously. A description of the GOTHAM system, the OPENGATE program, and Boricua Center is provided here.
The GOTHAM system

The GOTHAM educational system was founded in 1847 and is currently, as of 2010, the largest urban public university. GOTHAM of New York consists of 23 institutions. Among those institutions there are 11 senior colleges, six community colleges, and the GOTHAM Graduate School. The colleges that were interview sites for this study were Prospect College, Canarsie College, Justice College of Criminal Justice, and the Big Metropolis Community College. The colleges within the GOTHAM conglomerate offer academic programs leading to associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees. As of fall of 2009, there were a total of 259,515 full and part-time students enrolled at GOTHAM. Of those students, 30.1% were White, 26.9% were Latino, and 26.1% were African American. The Summary of Degrees Granted by Race/Ethnicity and Gender: Percentages report for 2008-2009 show that within this time period, a total of 37,385 degrees were awarded, and of those degrees 410 were doctorates. Among all of the degrees awarded, 39.6% of the degrees were awarded to Whites, 23.9% were awarded to African Americans and 19.8% were awarded to Latinos. Of the 410 doctoral degrees awarded, 76.1% were awarded to Whites, 5.6% were awarded to Latinos, and 5.1% were awarded to African Americans. I reviewed all of the GOTHAM Summary of Degrees Granted by Race/Ethnicity and Gender: Percentages reports from the time period of 1993-1994 until 2008-2009 and African Americans and Latinos were notably underrepresented in terms of GOTHAM doctoral degree attainment compared to Whites. This is consistent with the literature that I reviewed for this study pointing to the fact that Latinos are sorely underrepresented in terms of doctoral degree attainment in general.
At GOTHAM, there are a total of 6,700 full-time teaching faculty members and a total of 25,153 total instructional staff including full and part-time individuals. Of the 25,153 instructional total, 57.5% are White, excluding Italian Americans, 16.4% are African American, 6.9% are Latino, excluding Puerto Ricans, and 3.3% are Puerto Rican (in raw numbers, 474 full-time and 355 part-time for a total of 829 Puerto Rican individuals). Based on these statistics, produced by the GOTHAM Office of Human Resources Management, Staff Facts, Fall 2008 Edition there appears to be a glaring disparity between White and Latino faculty representation, particularly faculty of Puerto Rican ethnicity. I found this interesting because the total Latino student body for the same time period, as previously stated, was about 1/3 of the total GOTHAM population, or 26.9%.

The OPENGATE program

The OPENGATE program offers services at each of the senior colleges within the GOTHAM system. The program was created in 1966 when the New York State Legislature enacted the program in order to promote equality and educational opportunity at GOTHAM. The OPENGATE program facilitates the admission and acceptance of students who would not qualify through regular admissions criteria. The program provides academic, financial, and counseling assistance to these students in order to ensure that they succeed at GOTHAM. The OPENGATE Program offers instructional programs that help students to develop requisite language and math skills. Tutoring is offered in most subjects, and the Program offers peer-mentoring so that incoming OPENGATE students will have the opportunity to connect with successful
upperclassmen that can help guide them through the college environment. Financial assistance is offered in the form of assistance with tuition, transportation, and books. All OPENGATE students are assigned a counselor during their first semester at GOTHAM and they remain with that counselor throughout their enrollment. OPENGATE counselors assist their students in transitioning themselves from high school to college, they assist the student in choosing an appropriate major, and they help their students achieve their academic and personal goals. Finally, OPENGATE program counselors enjoy the same faculty status as other GOTHAM professors.

Boricua Center

Boricua Center is located at Prospect College. The Center was established in 1973 and was created in order to serve the Puerto Rican community in general, but Prospect students and faculty especially. The Centers mission is to collect, preserve and provide access to archival and library resources documenting the history and culture of Puerto Ricans. The Center also produces research about the diasporic experiences of Puerto Ricans.

The Boricua Center is a Puerto Rican research center, with a staff of researchers who conduct research in a number of areas such history, migration, race, class, gender, education, political and human rights, public health, and social welfare. The Center produces publications such as Boricua Center Journal, a refereed publication, policy briefs, and a newsletter called El Noticia. The Center’s Library is located within Prospect College’s main library and contains resources documenting the history and culture of
Puerto Ricans; their collection includes books, newspapers, periodicals, audio, film, video, photographs and recorded music.

The Participants

Because I was able to conduct the first and second set of participant interviews exactly four weeks apart, in sequence, at approximately the same hours, I will introduce the participants and present their stories in the same systematic order. First, I will introduce the participants by providing information about them that I believed to be salient to this study and helpful for providing a context for their stories. I will provide their background and demographic information such as their affiliation to the GOTHAM system, approximate age, place of birth, location where raised, along with their employment, marital, and family status during the time period of doctoral attendance. Because of the number of participants and for ease of reading, I summarized this set of data in two separate tables. Table number 4 contains Graciella’s, Angelica’s, Lissette’s, and Hector’s information. Table number 5 contains Marisol’s, Miguel’s, Yvette’s, and Victor’s information for quick reference.
Table 4.
Graciella’s, Angelica’s, Lissette’s, and Hector’s Demographic Information

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graciella</th>
<th>Angelica</th>
<th>Lissette</th>
<th>Hector</th>
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Table 5

Marisol’s, Miguel’, Yvette’s, and Victor’s Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Marisol</th>
<th>Miguel</th>
<th>Yvette</th>
<th>Victor</th>
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</table>

Second, I will provide information related to the participants’ doctoral institution such as the name of the institution that the participant attended, the type of degree earned, financial aid status, full or part-time school status, and whether they attended a distance program or not. Again, for easy reading, I placed this information in two tables. Table 6 contains Graciella’s, Angelica’s, Lissette’s, and Hector’s information. Table number 7 contains Marisol’s, Miguel’, Yvette’s, and Victor’s information for quick reference. These data were collected during the two formal face-to-face interviews that I conducted with each participant, by e-mail correspondence, during a series of member checks, and by telephone conversations that took place before and after the formal interviews.
Table 6
Graciella’s, Angelica’s, Lissette’s, and Hector’s Academic Institution Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Graciella</th>
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<th>Lissette</th>
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Table 7
Marisol’s, Yvette’s, Miguel’, and Victor’s Academic Institution Information

<table>
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<th>Marisol</th>
<th>Yvette</th>
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In this chapter, I will summarize the participants’ lived doctoral experiences by providing a basic profile of the participant, followed by a more detailed description of them. Based on my journal entries, I will describe my basic impression of the
participants, along with a description of my experiences interacting within the interview setting prior to each participant interview (see sections titled My Interview Experience with…). I will then describe the components of the participants’ lived experiences with the doctoral process. I will share the thoughts that I journaled as I went through the process of bracketing my feelings about the participants to more clearly analyze the research data (see sections titled After the Interviews: Bracketing my Feeling About…). In order to add to the usefulness of the study, I will also share the participants’ advice to future Puerto Rican doctoral students and their suggestions about how the underrepresentation of Puerto Ricans with doctorates can be improved.

As part of the phenomenological method employed in this study, I analyzed a set of transcripts for each participant along with other data such as journal entries and books and articles that I used to validate my analysis. My analysis resulted in the emergence of four major themes that I determined to be the components of the participants’ lived experience with their education and doctoral process. The components of the participants doctoral experiences were: 1) Personal Factors or personal (internal/external) barriers and facilitators; 2) Social Role Factors or social role barriers and facilitators; 3) Cultural Factors or cultural barriers and facilitators, and 2) Social Factors or social barriers and facilitators. All of the participants contributed variable experiences to each of these components.

The components of the participants’ lived doctoral experiences were based on the major themes that emerged during the analysis of the participants’ transcripts. I developed the major themes by identifying subthemes from the excerpts of the
participants’ transcripts. The subthemes were coalesced into the major themes and were identified as either barriers or facilitators. The major themes were validated by a series of member checks, a peer review, and by triangulation of the contents of the data with outside sources such as books, articles and journal entries.

I have included a list of the subthemes and an explanation of the emergent major theme categories in this section. For the sake of clarity, the major themes will be referred to as the components of the participants’ lived experience with the doctoral process, and the subcategories will be referred as the variables that influenced those components, henceforth. The variables can also be factored as barriers of facilitators.

Personal Factors as a Component is a broad category that I developed, which includes those barriers or facilitators related internally or externally to the participants’ self or person (mind or body). An internal Personal Factor would include how the participant felt or what they thought about their doctoral experience. An external Personal Factor could be related to the participants’ temporary life circumstance, such as the participants’ financial situation. The variables subsumed under the Personal Factors as a Component category consisted of internal barriers such as, fear of rejection because of being pregnant, having a negative attitude toward standardized testing, lack of self-efficacy, negative reaction to the loss of a child, fear of not being good enough, and procrastination. Internal facilitators included having the drive to succeed academically, having an innate interest their dissertation topic, having a sense of self-efficacy, and visualizing graduation. External barriers included having a lack of finances. External facilitators included having financial aid (such as a fellowship).
The Social Role Factors as a Component category was developed to include experiences that the participants had because of the interaction between their social role obligations. When I say social roles, I am referring to those social roles identified and validated by Havighurst and other researchers. The social roles that pertained to the participants of this study included the roles of adult learner (used to represent the participants’ obligations as a doctoral student), worker (used to represent those experiences related to the participants’ job responsibilities), parent (used to represent those experiences related to the participants’ responsibilities for their children), son/daughter (used to represent those experiences the participants had related to their parents), sibling (used to represent those experience the participants had related to their brothers or sisters), spouse/significant other (used to describe those experience related to being or having a spouse or significant other), religious affiliate (used to describe those experiences that result from participating in religion, or spiritual practice), and friend (used to describe those experiences related to having friends).

Variables related to Social Role Factors as a Component include barriers such as issues related to ill or uneducated parents, social role strain (the interaction of simultaneous social role responsibilities), and facilitators such as participating in the role of religious affiliate (or having a strong sense of spirituality), being an innate adult learner, having the support of parents and siblings, and being raised by parents with high expectations. For the sake of brevity, the social role variables in this category are referred to by the associated social role only in tables and figures throughout this document.
The Cultural Factors as a Component category was created to include those experiences the participants’ had related to race (recall that Puerto Ricans are racially heterogeneous), or ethnicity, being Latino, or appearing to be Latino, and being Puerto Rican. Variables related to Culture as a Component include barriers related to Puerto Rican gender roles, a lack of Latino role models or mentors, and negative occurrences due to Puerto Rican ethnicity (referred to as negative event by ethnicity). Facilitators include attending an educational institution accepting of cultural difference (institution culturally accepting), being part of a Latino cohort, Latino role models, service to Puerto Ricans, and Puerto Rican food, music, and games, Puerto Rican ethnicity, Latino community, and becoming a Latino/a role model.

The Social Factors as a Component category was created to include those doctoral experiences the participants had that were social in nature and not related to culture and social roles. These experiences were related to social events, other students, faculty, and the institutions that they either worked or attended school at. Variables related to Social Factors as a Component include barriers such events related to September 11, 2001 (catastrophic social event), gender, attending school at an over populated institution, and social class. Facilitators included having peer networks, having faculty status privilege, gender, having social networks, faculty support, and institutional support (ease and convenience of program).

Participants’ Similarities and Differences

The participants had a number of background characteristics in common and there were some differences. As was previously stated, all of the participants were affiliated
with the GOTHAM system in some way. Their ages ranged from being in their 30’s to being in their 60’s. Three participants were born in New York, four were born in Puerto Rico, and one was born in Spain. All but two of the participants were raised in the United States mainland. Five were raised in New York, one in New Jersey, and two individuals were raised in Puerto Rico. All of the individuals were bilingual (Spanish/English), but spoke English fluently. Four individuals were married, three were single, and one individual was divorced while working towards their doctorate. Five individuals had children and all of the individuals worked at least part-time during their doctoral experience.

The participants also had a number of institutional variables in common and some variables were different. All of the individuals completed their doctoral studies while living in New York. Two individuals attended distance programs offered by institutions outside of the state of New York. These participants completed a majority of their course work at an off-site campus located in the state of New York, but they were required to attend some course work at the institutions’ main campus. All but one individual earned a Ph.D. One participant earned an Ed.D. Most of the participants attended full-time doctoral studies, and most were fellowship recipients.

Participants’ Lived Doctoral Experiences

Introducing Graciella.

“A doctorate is something that you either do it or you don’t…”

Graciella is currently a GOTHAM faculty member who was born and raised in New York. During the time that I interviewed her, she was approximately 50 years of
age. Graciella attended her doctoral studies at Hebrew University in New York City in the 1980’s, where she attained a Ph.D. in Bi-lingual Developmental Psychology. While attending her doctoral studies at Hebrew University, Graciella was employed part-time, as GOTHAM faculty member. She was also married and had two young children. Graciella was a Title 7 Fellowship recipient and she attended all of her classes at the Hebrew University, Zion School of Psychology campus.

My interview experience with Graciella.

Graciella was the first person I interviewed for the purposes of this study. I scheduled my first interview with Graciella, on February 22, 2010, at 10:00 am. In order to get to the interview, I needed to travel from where I was staying, at the Wellington Hotel in Manhattan, to Brooklyn. I allowed for an hour and a half of travel time, believing this to be more time than I needed. However, despite prior travel planning, I had difficulty locating the correct subway station that would give me access to the train that I need to take. I also had difficulty in discerning the correct side of the track that I needed to be on in order to take the train going in the desired direction, going to Brooklyn rather than Queens.

Once I found the train that I needed to be on, I emerged from the train station only to realize that I was now lost on foot in Flatbush, Brooklyn. I used the GPS function on my cell phone to help me find Canarsie College. When I found myself walking among other individuals toting knapsacks, I became confident that I was walking in the correct direction. Needless to say, I arrived at Canarsie College just minutes before the scheduled interview time, only to have to deal with security upon my arrival. I was required to
present my identification and state my reason for being on campus prior to being allowed to enter. After that, I finally found myself walking down the antiseptic looking halls of Canarsie College, on my way to Graciella’s office for one of two interviews that would cumulatively total two hours and forty minutes.

**My impression of Graciella.**

I found Graciella sitting at her desk in her office, which is located at the end of a narrow hallway within a suite of offices. Her humble but cozy office was cluttered with books that appeared organized in some fashion. I could not help but notice her thick white hair and cool yet welcoming demeanor. I started out by explaining why I was there, the purpose of my research, and by telling her how grateful I was for her time. She seemed non-reactive and asked me if I wanted to go to a different room that would give us more space. I replied that I was comfortable where I was, that I was accustomed to interviewing anywhere.

My first impression of Graciella was that she exhibited a reserved demeanor. Although she appeared serious and expressionless at first, after the interview started her sense of humor surfaced. I could tell that that her quick wit and practical attitude gave her the ability to flip any bad situation in her favor. After two face-to-face interviews with Graciella, I surmised that she is a direct communicator, who gets to the point, and I could tell that she would have no trouble maintaining her focus once she sets a goal. Despite her cool exterior, Graciella made me feel very comfortable and accepted. I immediately felt connected to her, although at a distance.
A closer look at Graciella.

Graciella was born and raised in the South Bronx in New York. She attended Catholic school up to seventh grade in the Bronx, and then went to Puerto Rico to live for a year. While living in Puerto Rico, Graciella attended Catholic school for eighth grade. After that, she returned to the Bronx and graduated from James Monroe, a public high school. Graciella completed her undergraduate studies at Prospect College and she attainted a Master’s in Counseling from one of GOTHAM’s college. Ten years later, Graciella was presented with an offer to obtain her doctorate that was “put in her lap.” Graciella stated,

Actually it was put in my lap, that's why I went back. I had a colleague of mine who is a member of the faculty here [Canarsie College] and she was in the doctoral program at Hebrew University. She said that Dr. Harry Swartz was the person in charge of this program, was looking for people who were bi-lingual, to be accepted into the bi-lingual developmental psychology [program]. She had promised him that she would bring people so he could interview them… So I thought of my sister. So I said I'm going to call my sister. And she said, ‘But I want you to apply for it too.’ So ok, so we we’ll both apply. And I never thought that I would be selected because I was like one month from giving birth and I said there is no way that this guy is going to accept me. So, we both went to the interview and we ended up both getting accepted. So that's how I ended up in a doctoral program.
Components of Graciella’s doctoral experience.

Personal Factors as a component: internal/external barriers fear of rejection, negative attitude, lack of self-efficacy, lack of finances.

Upon being exposed to the notion of attending doctoral studies, Graciella perceived barriers that were related internally and externally to her life circumstances. Internally, Graciella thought that being nine months pregnant would cause her to be rejected by Dr. Swartz of the Hebrew University doctoral program. She also had negative feelings about the prospect of taking standardized test in order to be admitted. Another internal factor that Graciella experienced was related to her sense of self efficacy. At first, Graciella was not sure how she would fare as a doctoral student; she thought that her sister Angelica would be better suited than herself. However, when Graciella and Angelica achieved high grades after their first semester, Graciella realized that they belonged. Graciella told me, “I think that the fact that we did so well…kind of validated the fact that we were supposed to be there.”

As far as external factors related to her life circumstance, Graciella felt that she could not afford to pursue a doctorate. Graciella relayed that when she applied for the Hebrew University doctoral program, her husband had recently graduated from law school, and was earning a humble salary working for legal aid. The fact that Graciella received a Title Seven Fellowship, made it possible for her to attain a doctorate. In fact, during her second interview, Graciella opined that a lack of financial resources may be one factor related to the lack of representation of Latino doctoral graduates. Another
factor that she mentioned was her perceived erosion of the American and Latino family unit. Graciella logically pointed out:

And when you think about, in our society, and I don’t know what the percent is for Latinos, if you figure out, 50% of our families are divorced. So now we are talking about, once you get divorced, now you are poor. You are head of household with less money. So then on top of that, we have 50%, that pool of people or maybe more, one parent families. Does anybody have, even if you want to go for your doctorate very slowly, do you have an additional $10,000 per year to do it? $10,000? $15,000 a year? Do you have it? I don’t think that many people have it. And in addition to that, how many of those people are still paying for undergraduate? Or they have their masters and they are still paying for their masters. That’s something that they have to look at. How many people walk out of a B.A. without owing money? And I would say a lot of Latinos, it’s not like going away to college, where mommy and daddy is going to pick-up your B.A. Most Latinos who go away, they end up owing money. A lot of the students who go away, from more affluent families, the parents pay that. So at least they come out not owning any money on their B.A.

**Personal Factors as a component: internal/external facilitators drive to succeed, financial aid.**

Having overcome her initial fear of rejection from the program because of her pregnancy, her uncertainty about her potential doctoral success, and her lack of finances, Graciella was ready to take on the challenge of doctoral work. Graciella’s drive to
succeed academically was evident by her successful completion of a bachelor’s and master’s degree, despite the discouragement that she received from her parents concerning her academic endeavors. Graciella said that her parents would have been perfectly happy with a daughter who had completed high school and gone no farther educationally; her mother specifically encouraged her to become a hairdresser or secretary instead of putting herself through college. Graciella said of her educational fortitude, “What expectations I had about me completing any kind of education was placed on myself, by myself.” According a book written by Graciella and Angelica, Graciella’s desire to succeed educationally also stemmed from the fact that she viewed having a college degree as a way out of poverty and a way to compete with her educationally high achieving sister, Angelica.

In sum, Graciella was acceptance to her doctoral program at Hebrew University, Zion School of Psychology, with a $60,000 fellowship that facilitated her attendance. However, this opportunity came concomitant with a series of responsibilities that Graciella would have to juggle. First, the Hebrew University program was a full-time program. The program was a dual degree program in developmental psychology and bilingualism that required the completion of 105 credits. Dr. Swartz required the students to take 21 credits per semester because their course work needed to be completed within two years. Second, upon Graciella’s acceptance, she remained working as a part-time counselor at Canarsie College. Third, Graciella was married to a man who was a recent law school graduate, working on a budding career as an attorney. Fourth, Graciella was the mother of a two year old toddler and two month old infant. Finally, Graciella was
caring for her mother, who was gravely ill. Graciella’s description of her life while she was going through the doctoral process appropriately sets the stage for how she perceived those experiences:

And I had my mother who was dying in my house. My mother was totally paralyzed for the last eleven years of her life, and she came to live with me because she had been with Angelica, and Angelica could not take care of her anymore 'cause Angelica had given birth to her son. So, I ended up moving to New York, 'cause I was in Jersey, when my husband went to law school. So I moved over here. My mother came to live with me….it was a very challenging time, ‘cause I had all these things going on. When I'm trying to get a doctorate, I have a two year old, a two month old, my mother that is at home, my husband is trying to make his career goal. It was like crazy.

After reading both of Graciella’s transcripts several times, it was clear that Graciella’s doctoral experience was influenced most by the interaction between her social role responsibilities of being wife, mother, daughter and her extremely strong desire to succeed as a doctoral student.

**Social role component- role barriers adult learner, parent, daughter, spouse.**

During my interviews with Graciella, she described her doctoral experience as intense, chaotic, and crazy. In order to get Graciella to elaborate on what that meant to her, I asked her to describe her typical day. Graciella described her grueling routine by stating that she woke up at approximately 5 o’clock in the morning, after waking up several times through the night to tend to her two year old daughter, and mother who
needed assistance using the bathroom in the middle of the night. Graciella would then feed her children. At 8 or 9 o’clock a.m., her children’s babysitter and mother’s homemaker would arrive to assist. Graciella said that, at first, she had a difficult time finding a reliable babysitter; she hired and fired four to five babysitters during her first year of doctoral studies, and she even had a babysitter quit suddenly on her first day of school at Hebrew University.

After Graciella left her home for school in the morning, she drove to Manhattan’s lower eastside to pick up another doctoral student. She then drove to 18th street to pick up her sister, and then sometimes she would pick up another doctoral student in Spanish Harlem. She would then drive to the Bronx where the Zion School of Psychology is located. After class, Graciella would study three to four hours at the library and return home, at times as late as 11 or 12 pm, to sleep and begin the same routine the next day. Graciella followed this routine for two years, while completing her course work.

This intense juggling of responsibilities is an example of social role strain. Social role strain is experienced when an individual has difficulty in meeting their social role demands (Home, 1997). Two components of social role strain are role conflict and role overload. These are instances where social role demands must be met simultaneously or there is insufficient time to meet the demands. Graciella’s description of her doctoral course work routine illustrates the stress and individual experiences when they are torn between the demanding roles of being a doctoral student, and having the responsibilities for caring for very young children and a parent who are dependent on others for their very survival.
When I asked Graciella to describe her worst day, while working on her doctorate, she provided two instances of role conflict that caused her to have to instantly choose between her responsibilities as a student and her responsibilities as a mother and daughter. During the first instance, Graciella said that she was at the Hebrew University computer lab one evening. She did not own a computer or a cellphone at the time. Graciella used a payphone to call home and her husband informed her that her daughter had cystic fibrosis. Graciella did not know what cystic fibrosis was, so she did some research with the help of a medical student and she found out that her child might die.

After learning this, Graciella immediately left the library. She was in route to the hospital through Queens when her vehicle came to a complete stop on the highway; apparently the France Tavern Restaurant had been bombed. Much to Graciella’s frustration, she was stuck in traffic for two or three hours. To make matters worse, Graciella said that her car was in disrepair and she thought it might break down on the highway. Luckily, a few days later, Graciella discovered that her daughter had been misdiagnosed, but the experience was no less horrific while she lived through it.

In the second instance, Graciella said that she was at Hebrew College’s library when her name was called on the loud speaker. Graciella went to the front desk and the clerk handed her the telephone. Graciella’s mother’s caretaker asked Graciella to come home right away because there was a problem. Evidently, Graciella’s mother had been taken to the hospital that morning. Graciella intended to go to the hospital before going to the library, but she decided not to after learning that her mother would be released that
same day. While Graciella was at the library, her mother was brought home from the hospital, and after she was placed in her bed, Graciella’s mother died.

Graciella said that both of these family tragedies occurred within her first year of doctoral studies, and the incidents happened within two or three months of each other. She relayed that her mother died on a Thursday and both Graciella and Angelica were back in school by Monday. When I asked Graciella how she “held it together” she said:

I don't know. We just did it. We just knew that we had to get this done and we were just very focused, very focused on what we were doing. And um, I just knew either you put your whole self into it, or you don't. Ya know, you can't just take things like half way. You either have to do it, a doctorate is something that you either do it or you don't.

It was evident that Graciella was able to overcome these two family tragedies because of her unwavering sense of commitment to obtaining her doctorate. However, a number of times during both interviews, Graciella said that there was always a gnawing sense of guilt because she had two young children that she would leave with her husband, or with a babysitter, in order to tend to her doctoral work. Graciella said that this went against what she thought she should be doing as a mother:

…I think that there were times where I felt, that I wanted this doctorate, but I also felt guilty because I also had two kids. They were very young, infant and two years old. And there were times that I went against what I thought I should be doing, like I would leave the kids with my husband. I would leave the kids with the babysitter. I would be all over the place. And that really went against what I
thought I should be doing as a mother. But on the other hand, I knew that I had a full paid scholarship here. And either I took advantage of it, and if I didn’t, I wasn’t going to have that opportunity because financially we were barely making it. I knew I could not get a doctorate, how could I get a doctorate, you know? I think that it impacted on me in a sense. There was guilt there that I felt as a mother, you have little kids, you’re leaving them a whole day with your husband, see you tonight. On a Saturday, I’ll see you tomorrow. And then I have my mother living with me and she was sick.

Graciella’s sense of guilt as a mother were compounded by her sense of responsibility to her mother and desire to maintain the traditions that her family was accustom to. Graciella shared her experience regarding a tough choice that she had to make with what turned out to be her mother’s last Thanksgiving:

…I mean it’s sad. I always make Thanksgiving. I always had Thanksgiving at my house. My mother always looked forward to this and I remember the last Thanksgiving, I was so crazy with the doctorate and all of that I said I’m not doing anything. So that day it was pouring rain. I remember, and I studied with Angelica in her office and then I came home. And I could not even find a place to buy food. I ended up getting Chinese food. And my mother died soon after, a few months later. It was very sad because, Angelica says to me, she probably realized how crazy I was because I always had Thanksgiving. I had people over. You know, I felt very guilty about it because it was Thanksgiving. Christmas, the big holidays, we were out of it, Angelica and I. We were just like, we don’t have time for this.
So you go through all of these guilty feelings because part of that is the role of wife, mother, daughter, and you just, sometimes you just can’t live up to all that. And that’s also a process that you learn- that you can’t be everything to everybody. You can’t do this. So you have to choose what you want to do. You can’t you know, it’s a hard process to go through but you realize that you can’t do this. I’m one person; I can’t make Thanksgiving dinner for 12 people. Not this year: we’ll have Chinese food.

**Social role component-role facilitator sibling.**

Based on the two interviews that I conducted with Graciella, I gathered that the single most positive influence to her doctoral success was her relationship with her sister Angelica. Both Angelica and Graciella were accepted to their Hebrew University doctoral programs at the same time. They relied on each other for support during their doctoral program, as they continued to follow each other through the stages of their lives: being married, having children, and obtaining their doctoral degrees at approximately the same times. Their relationship was synergistic and mutually beneficial as Graciella described:

She's [Angelica’s] like an A type personality, so she was, like I’ll give you an example. I would pick her up in the morning and she would have index cards from the readings. Oh, do you know what this means. And she would test me and whoever was in the car with us. She's like, she would organize us, ya know. She was like good to have in that respect ya know. And I was good in other ways for her. She would, Angelica is very, she's like obsessive compulsive about, she's like into perfection. So like we'd be doing papers and I would be like, I'm finished. I
finished this paper. And she would be like, oh I have to read three more books. I said, you don't have to read three more books, just hand in the freaking paper. Just hand it in, hand it in, hand it in. And she would do fine. But if I had not been there, I think she'd still be trying to complete her doctorate. Because she's like, and by the way, there was someone who was just like her, never finished her doctorate. I would say to her that's enough, let me read the paper. This is fine, you can hand this in, you're going to do o.k. ya know. Just hand it in. I would make her. Stop with the writing, you have to do another paper, ya know. So and that was that.

Graciella’s said that there was a combination of things that helped her through the doctoral process. Graciella’s relationship and support from her sister Angelica was the most helpful facilitator, followed by the fact that Graciella attended her doctoral studies with a cohort of 15 other Latino students (will be address in a later section). There were also other attributes that Graciella possessed that helped her to maintain enough balance in her life to meet both her family and doctoral obligations. When I asked Graciella how she was able overcome these challenges her responses suggested that she managed by being able multitask responsibilities. Graciella indicated that the overwhelming number of simultaneous responsibilities caused her to focus. She was incredibly organized and did not waste time. Graciella stated:

I think part of it has to do [with], if you’re married, and you have kids and you have all this going on in your life, you can't waste time. You have to be very organized. And very focused. I think that that helped us. As soon as, like if my
kids were playing in the room, I had my book opened, reading. It was very, I did not waste time at all. And I think that, when we don't have all those challenges, you have a tendency to kind of float and waste time, and kind of indulge in things that are fun.

Graciella also said her mother worked when she was well and Graciella’s mother-in-law had to work because she was a single mother with four children. Because of this, Graciella felt that she had permission to do more than stay at home and raise a family.

According to Graciella:

Well, I was pretty crazy during those times ‘cause I was a mother of 2, plus I was doing my doctorate, plus I was working. But the fact that I had a mother who had worked also helped. I think that if I had a mother who never worked it would have been really difficult for me to have done all the things that I done. The fact that I had a mother who worked kind of gives you permission to not be 24 hours a day with your kids. You know what I mean: Its ok for me. I don’t have to be here all the time. And the fact that my husband came from a family were his mother was a single parent and she worked in a factory to bring up four kids, so she was always working too. So that kind of gave me permission to you know, to be able to do more than just stay home.

Graciella realized her limitations during her first semester enrolled as a doctoral student. She quickly understood that she could not conventionally fulfill the role of mother, and daughter and still take advantage of the fellowship opportunity that presented
itself, and ultimately made it possible for Graciella to get her doctorate. She also realized that she was far from being able to fulfill her role as a conventional Puerto Rican wife.

*Cultural component- barriers.*

*Gender role.*

Conventional Puerto Rican family expectations are centered on sex-role related behavior that dictates that a Puerto Rican wife should be bound to the home and bearing of children. Having been exposed to these values, Graciella felt that leaving her children with her husband went against what she thought she should be doing as a wife, married to a Puerto Rican husband who culturally was not raised to fulfill those responsibilities. Graciella’s doctoral success seemed to be overshadowed by her sense of guilt over her unwillingness to subscribe to traditional Puerto Rican values that would serve to hinder the completion of her doctorate. Graciella commented:

You have a Puerto Rican husband who is like dealing with things that he never expected to deal with... He has to come home from work and he is taking care of two kids and ya know changing dippers and all kinds of, I don't think that he was too happy about that, but ya know. I was pushing as much as I can push without him going crazy.

When I asked Graciella to elaborate on what she meant she said:

Well, I don't think that Puerto Rican males…expect to take on those roles of taking care of their kids, and they expect you to be home and have food ready and whatever. It’s like a real traditional male/female gender role thing, but…he had to
adjust. He had to deal with it. And so, I had to have the strength to say well this is what I want and you have to do this…

Graciella said that her husband was not always happy to help and he would often try and make Graciella feel guilty because he was home taking care of their children, while Graciella was at school. Graciella recalled:

Yeah, sometimes it wasn't a happy helping. Ya know, but, I did what I had to do. Like I remember calling from the library and him saying, ‘Oh, Melissa was asking for you. Oh she was so sad. She wants to know where mommy is?’ Ya know, and he would do this like every time I called from the library, so I stopped calling from the library. Ya know, he'd say, ‘Well, why didn't you call last night.’ I'd say ‘Well I'm not going through guilt trips.’ Ya know. You put her to sleep. And that kind of hurt me to do that to her because she did not talk to me, but on the other hand, I had to decide, do I want to be manipulated, because it was kind of a manipulative thing also. I had to be strong in many ways and um, not care what people thought. Not care what his family thought or ya know because they probably thought, this poor man, he is by himself with these two kids, ya know, I don't care.

I asked Graciella where she thought Puerto Rican social role expectations came from and she said that the expectations were “all around you,” meaning that they get transmitted by Puerto Rican neighbors, parents, and family members. Graciella said that Puerto Rican men did not change diapers, and feed kids. She felt that there is still an expectation that the female is going to be the caretaker and nurturer, and although some
fathers are engaged in raising their children, when “push comes to shove, the woman is seen as someone who is responsible, still.” Graciella felt that culturally, Puerto Rican women are not raised to be independent. Women are expected to be subservient to their husbands and to ask their husbands for permission. Women were expected to get married, and if the woman worked, it was to help support her husband, not to be the primary support of the family. Graciella said, “So it was like, the husband went out and he worked and then you got a job that supplemented that salary, but not to equal the salary, or surpass it…” Graciella stated that this was one of the reasons why her parents failed to see a need for Graciella to get an education. Graciella explained that culturally and generationally speaking, she was the exception in terms of the roles that she took on, because few women went to college during those times, earned a master’s and went on for a doctorate, and if they earned this level of education, they certainly were not married with children. Graciella thought that Puerto Rican women of her generation were judged not by what they accomplished outside of the home, but what they accomplished within the home, and Puerto Rican men were not held to the same standard. Graciella explicated:

There are certain expectations of you as a woman, as a mother, and I think it works against you [being independent], it really does. Like what is a good wife or a good mother or you know. Like one of the things with Puerto Rican people is like, oh, she’s got a clean home. That makes you a good wife, or a good mother or whatever, you know. I think that’s a lot of crap. You know, it really is. It’s a lot of crap. I mean you could have a messy home, dirty home or whatever. It doesn’t make you a better or worse wife. But there’s, nobody would say, he’s got a dirty
home, he’s a lousy father, or he’s a lousy husband. But if you have a dirty home and you don’t, it’s like they look at the woman. Where the man could, does that make him less of a father? That would not come into play. So I think it works against women a lot. We are expected to be a certain way.

Based on Graciella’s comments, gender related double standards and marianismo, or the expectation that Latino women be submissive to their husband, be self-less and home-centered, are also part of Puerto Rican culture. Graciella’s ability to reject these traditional values facilitated her ability to attend to her doctoral studies with the assistance of her husband. However, the guilt that Graciella felt suggests that impact of cultural values and the consequences that an individual faces as they evolve and grow away from such traditions.

*No Latino role models.*

Another cultural barrier that Graciella spoke about was the lack of Latino or Puerto Rican individuals with professional jobs to serve as role models. According to Graciella, the lack of role models within an individual’s culture results in a misguided view that attaining a doctorate, or a professional degree is unattainable, or is mystical in some way. There is also a perception that doctors, lawyers, and other professional individuals should be glorified. Graciella believes that this causes minorities, like Puerto Ricans, to feel inferior, like you have to do more or better than others in order to feel at parity, and this sense of inferiority is culturally transmitted from parent to child.

According to Graciella:
I think our parents kind of like glorified these people in these positions, so you glorified them. It’s almost like the response of the child is, oh, that's such a special person. It’s almost like that person walks on water. And maybe that's the wrong message to give, ya know. I don't know. Like in my home, like I'll sometimes have four or five people with PhD's, I have a lawyer, I have judge, I have, and they’re all in my house when I'm having a get-together or whatever, and they’re all Puerto Rican and their all African Americans and they’re all educated, so for my kids it’s a very different experience for them. Like you said the regular people they know have all gone through this, so it’s doable. Ya know, it's doable, if they want to do it, they can do it. It's up to them, but it's doable. With me, it’s like I did not have. Ya known, it’s like these college professors are up-there and I don't know any college professors.

Graciella said that although she experienced a lack of Puerto Rican role models, her children will not experience such a disadvantage. Graciella stated that because she has a Ph.D., her children will assume that they can attain a doctorate also. Graciella made the following comments about what happens when Puerto Ricans have role models:

You have role models. You have people who are like you who have succeeded, so the only assumption that you can make from that is that I can do it. But if you don’t see anybody around, you start questioning, maybe there is something wrong with you. Or maybe people like me don’t make it. There is all kinds of assumptions that you make.
Graciella stated that when Puerto Ricans see that others like them have attained a doctorate, the process becomes demystified, which results in the individual perceiving doctoral attainment as doable. Graciella believes that this positive message can be transmitted culturally through family and other social interaction. Graciella stated:

I think that they put this value, this thing on a doctorate, oh he’s got a doctorate, oh ya know. It’s like, yeah you got a doctorate. Instead of say, this is a process. And I think also um ya know I think when there are not a lot of people around you with a doctorate, the perception is that, oh, it must be really difficult… It’s almost like an unknown dimension… I have a cousin who is a doctor, I mentioned. He has four kids who are doctors, ok. Four kids that are doctors. They marry doctors too by the way, I mean. And his wife was a doctor. And of those four kids, three went to Harvard, one went to Brown, ok, this is one family. You say, how can that be? But to them, it's no big deal. It's like being in medicine, oh, my father's a doctor, my mother's a doctor. So I'm going to be a doctor. And their grandfather was a doctor on the other side, on the mother's side. So it's like, medicine is no big deal. Ya know. Or the perception when you are a kid, oh he's a doctor, he's a doctor. So, he's a doctor. It's just a process that you go through. It's a tough area to go into, but if you have the background and you have the knowledge to get through you are going to be fine. And I don't think that's really told to us, I think that we have this heightened sense of difficulty.
Negative event by ethnicity.

The social role barriers that Graciella experienced were compounded by some negative experiences that she had at Hebrew University, a predominately Jewish college. Graciella said that she recalls overhearing negative comments from faculty who felt that the Latino students admitted by Dr. Swartz should not be there. Culturally speaking, these faculty members had low expectations of the Latino students, despite the fact that students like Graciella and Angelica were academically accomplished. Graciella relayed the following incident:

Ya know, I remember a professor saying we were doing something in a computer lab and someone came in and said oh what class is this, who are these students? And he said, ‘Oh these are students who would not normally make it into doctoral program.’ He said this. And I'm saying to myself, Angelica is Phi Beta Kappa, she's got like got a 3.99 index. Ya know, like this guy is really off the wall, that we would not normally make it into a doctoral program and this is the kind of thinking. So culturally, it wasn't the most open, welcoming, ya know.

Graciella felt that because Hebrew University was a predominately Jewish school, the Puerto Rican cohort that she was admitted with “stood out like a sore thumb.” The bilingual cohort found it difficult to integrate with the general population of students because they were perceived as students that were given special preference because affirmative action, and the bilingual cohort was perceived as not being on the same level as other Hebrew University students. Graciella said that the ethnic differences were ever present during her doctoral experience. Graciella said:
The fact that you had the kosher lunch…One day it was meat and dairy or meat, and the next day was dairy. They would change the food. They would never have together. The food was totally so Kosher, it was very different. So everything about it was, your ethnicity was always there.

Graciella also said that the Hebrew University faculty was not very accommodating of the fact Graciella, Angelica, and the other Puerto Rican students where accustomed to recognizing Christian holidays such as Christmas. Since Jewish people typically do not celebrate Christmas, the Hebrew University academic schedule revolved around Jewish rather than Christian Holidays. Graciella shared the following experience with me:

The fact that we celebrated, I mean school was closed during their Holidays, as oppose to our holidays. The fact that we were given a final on Christmas Eve that kind of stuff. They did not care. They were like, and I told my mentor, you know like, he gave a test, like the 24th at 3 or 4 in the afternoon. I said to him, ‘That’s Christmas Eve. Why are you giving a test?’ I told him in front of the class. I said, ‘That’s the 24th of December.’ He said well you can take it the 24th…He said well do want it the 26th, I said no! And they didn’t care.

*Cultural component- facilitators.*

*Latino cohort.*

Although Graciella found it difficult to integrate within the predominately Jewish academic environment, she found it helpful that she attended classes with a Latino cohort of about 15 students. Graciella indicated that because of the cultural bond, they were very
supportive of one another. Since the Latino students were so different from everybody else, they insulate themselves and became even closer. Graciella said that had the cohort been smaller, they may have had an uneasy time at Hebrew University. But because the group consisted of 15 people that had an ethnic bond, they made each other feel comfortable.

_Social component - barriers._

_Social class and gender._

Graciella stated that cultural gender roles served as a barrier, but she also commented that social class may interact with gender to be a barrier to academic success. Graciella opined that gender roles seem to be more conventional for individuals of low socio economic status, in that gender differences are more pronounced. Graciella said that as the level of socioeconomic status rises, the gender roles become more equal. Graciella said that another reason that her family may have discouraged her educational pursuits because her family was from a low socioeconomic stratum, and for people within that stratum, it was unusual for a woman to get her doctorate. Graciella stated:

Well I think that, and I might be wrong, but my gut feeling is, that even though there are always gender roles regardless of how rich you are, I think that when you are rich, the further up you go, I think those gender roles become more alike, although there are always differences. But I think that were times, I think when you are poor the more defined, or at least when I was a child, they were a lot more defined. So women did this and men did that. And one of the things that women did not do was, very few, was go to college and get a degree and definitely not get
doctorate so, you know. I think that nothing in my childhood or in my experience really guided me towards that except that I was a good student. I don’t think that was a goal in life, it just kind of happened.

_Social component-facilitators._

_Peer network._

Independent of having a cultural bond with her cohort, Graciella felt that having gone through the doctoral experience with a network of peers that she had things in common with was extremely helpful. Graciella said that there were students in her cohort who also had children, grandchildren, and were married. This helped because she was attending doctoral classes with individuals with similar responsibilities. Graciella said that networking with other students in general was helpful because the students would help each other with exams and communicate among each other about which professors avoid. Graciella said that it is very import to be able to share information with other students. Graciella relayed the advantage of networking with other students with this story that she shared with me:

You have to network. You could do it by yourself, but I think it makes it a lot harder and you do, we learned that very early on. I remember Angelica and I we were like, studying, studying, studying for this midterm and we found out that the whole class was studying at somebody’s house. And we went to that person’s house, and they had copies of the midterm from the previous year. We were like hello. You know, and stuff like this. It’s like, you have to network, you really do.
**Graciella’s survival tactics.**

In sum, Graciella survived her doctoral experience because she was determined to complete the program despite the number of responsibilities that she had to attend to at the same time. Graciella expressed her sense of commitment and said numerous times during my interviews with her that she maintained an unwavering sense of focus on her goal to attain her doctorate. She also described instances that demonstrated her ability to make good use of her time by effectively multitasking, which also speaks to her level of organizational skill.

**Graciella’s advice to others.**

During my interview with Graciella, I asked her for some suggestions that may encourage other Latinos to pursue their doctorates. Graciella said that minorities and Latinos need to realize that obtaining a doctorate is just a process that needs to be chosen. Graciella believes that Latinos have an unrealistic view of what a doctoral program is, but as you go through the process, you realize that you are just as capable as anyone else. However Graciella warned that the doctoral process is a test at all levels. She said that the process will test your patients; it will test your humility, organization, and cognitive abilities, but you just have to go at your own pace. Graciella said there are many lessons to learn during the doctoral process. You learn how to be independent by working by yourself; you learn how to push yourself. Besides the knowledge you get, you go through an emotional and psychological process, but Graciella said you will finish, and you will have your degree, and it will come. The closer you get to completing your doctorate, the more motivated you will be. Graciella said that one way that Latinos can encourage other
Latinos to earn doctorates, is by earning a doctorate themselves, thereby becoming a role model for others.

Graciella also said that Latino doctoral students need to learn how to respond to institutions in a way that helps them to accomplish their goals; the doctoral process teaches you this. Graciella said, for instance, if someone criticizes your work, thank them, accept their advice and move on. Graciella suggested that you have to communicate in a way that manipulates the system into giving you what you want, and this is how you accomplish your goals. If not, you could be the brightest person in the world, and you will not make it through. Finally, Graciella said that doctoral students working on their dissertations should write something every day. Graciella advised:

Every day, you wake up. Even if you write one paragraph, you write that one paragraph and that’s one little thing towards the end.

**Summary: Graciella.**

In sum, upon being accepted as a Hebrew University doctoral student, Graciella experienced barriers and facilitators to her future success that emanated from personal factors. At first, Graciella thought that she would not be accepted as a student because she was pregnant when she applied. She also was resistant to the notion of having to take standardized test in order to apply. Graciella also doubted her abilities to be a successful doctoral student, and thought that her sister Angelica was a more suitable candidate than she was. It wasn’t until Graciella and Angelica received the highest grades in their cohort of 15 other Latino students that Graciella realized that she was in the correct place at Hebrew University, and that she and Angelica belonged.
Graciella’s doctoral experience was most influenced by the numerous social role responsibilities that she had to maintain, while attending to her doctoral studies. Graciella was a full-time Hebrew University doctoral student, who was married to a newly graduated law student, she was a mother of a toddler and infant, she was working part-time as a faculty member at Canarsie College, and she was tending to a terminally ill parent, all at the same time. Graciella was able to balance all of her responsibilities because she was accepted to the Hebrew University doctoral program with her sister Angelica, and they supported each other through the process. Graciella also was also able to effectively multitask; she made the most of her time by being focused on her goals and by being organized.

The cultural aspects of being a conventional Puerto Rican wife and mother caused Graciella to feel guilty for leaving her two children with her husband and babysitters, while she tended to her doctoral studies. Regardless of how Graciella felt, she was able to break from the bondage of conventional Puerto Rican customs in order to complete her doctorate. Graciella’s doctoral experience was also influenced by other cultural barriers, such as having a lack of Latino role models, which made the doctoral process seem mystical and unattainable. Graciella also experienced negative events at Hebrew University because she was Puerto Rican. Graciella, Angelica, and the other 15 Latino students who were accepted at Hebrew University had difficulty integrating into the general population because they were perceived at inferior students who were accepted only because of affirmative action. One major facilitator to Graciella’s doctoral success was the fact that Graciella went through the doctoral process with a large cohort of other
Latino doctoral students; the students were able to effectively insulate themselves from an otherwise adverse environment, and they supported one another academically and socially.

Finally, Graciella stated that independent of culture, social class and gender expectations served as a barrier during her doctoral process. Graciella said that she was raised in a lower socioeconomic environment and that she believed that the gender role expectations were more pronounced based on income level: the lower the family income, the more pronounced the gender role expectation, the higher the family income, the less pronounced were the differences between social role expectations. Graciella said that income level was yet another reason why her family discouraged her educational pursuits. The women in Graciella’s social environment were not expected to go to college, and certainly not expected to attain a doctorate. Graciella also said that networking among her peers in general was helpful to her doctoral process, because the students communicated about their course work and about which professors to avoid. See figure 2 for an illustration of the components of Graciella’s doctoral experience.

**After the interviews: bracketing my feelings about Graciella.**

After interviewing Graciella twice, I felt that I had gathered enough data from her to get a clear understanding of her doctoral experiences. Because I am a Puerto Rican doctoral student, I was able to relate her experiences on a personal level. I found that my educational experiences were similar to hers. For instance, I have always had doubts about my educational abilities because all but of two of my professors throughout my college experiences have been Anglo. Just like Graciella indicated, there were times that I
did make the assumption that perhaps there was something wrong with Latinos, especially Puerto Ricans, because there was such an under representation of professors of my own ethnicity. Another experience that I had similar to Graciella’s was discouragement and doubt from my family about my educational goals. When I was a woman in my twenties, my parents encouraged me to get married and raised a family, rather than to pursue an education and career in law enforcement. This discouragement had an impact on my self-efficacy for many years. Talking to Graciella was like looking into a mirror. I felt that Graciella was reflecting my own experiences with education, and telling me about myself. In analyzing what she said, I had to ensure that I wrote Graciella’s story and not my own. I also had to be careful not to react negatively to some of Graciella’s experiences because I had similar past experiences.
**Introducing Angelica.**

“How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.”

Angelica is currently a GOTHAM faculty member who is an Administrator for the OPENGATE program at Broadway College. She was born and raised in New York. During the time that I interviewed her, she was approximately 60 years of age. Angelica attended her doctoral studies at Hebrew University in New York City, in the 1980’s, where she attained a Ph.D. in Bi-lingual Developmental Psychology. While attending her doctoral studies at Hebrew University, Angelica was employed part-time, as an
OPENGATE program counselor at Broadway College. She was also married and had two young children. Angelica was a Title 7 Fellowship recipient and she attended all of her classes at the Hebrew University, Zion School of Psychology campus, with her sister Graciella.

My interview experience with Angelica.

After interviewing Graciella, I traveled by subway to Broadway college to interview her sister Angelica. After getting off of the train, I walked toward the college and stopped at a quaint deli that was fully occupied by young people who appeared to be students. I ordered my lunch and then swooped in on a table at the rear of the deli where I was fortunate enough to find a place to sit. I finished my lunch, walked to Broadway College, and presented my identification at the security desk with enough time to observe and take pictures before my interview with Angelica. I noticed that compared to the classic brick and iron openness of Canarsie College, Broadway was a towering, cluster of modern buildings, filled with a sea of students streaming in and out of the lobby. The chaotic flow of students moving rapidly through the hallways and stairwells amazed me.

When it was time to meet with Angelica, I walked to her office that was located in the far right corner of a bay of cubicles. Her office was large with a sizable window that provided a beautiful view of what appeared to be a condominium across the street. Angelica sat behind an “L” shaped desk. Her Macintosh computer, which sat on the northeast side of her desk, made a dingling sound every few minutes, indicating that she was receiving an e-mail. There were “sticky” note reminders, inspirational cartoons, and quotes against the wall in front of her computer. There was a bookshelf against the wall,
on the south side, opposite the window in her office that had shelves containing books and family pictures. Both of my interviews with Angelica, which cumulatively totaled 2 hrs and 47 minutes, took place at this office.

When I walked in, Angelica was talking to student who was in the process of developing a lesson plan for a multicultural education class. Angelica introduced me to the student and invited me to take part in the conversation. The student soon left and then Angelica turned her attention to me.

My impression of Angelica.

My impression of Angelica before, during and after the interview was that she is a warm, generous, vibrant, spiritual, multifaceted, and complex human being. I was amazed that we had similar interests and issues with ourselves and others. I felt very fortunate to be sitting across from such a brilliant woman who I wanted to get to know better and to be more like. Or, was I already like her?

A closer look at Angelica.

Before asking Angelica the questions from my interview protocol, I asked her to tell me about her background. Angelica indicated that she grew up in the South Bronx in the early 1950’s. She started kindergarten at a public school unable to speak English. Angelica went to Catholic School in New York from third grade until eighth. For ninth grade, Angelica attended Catholic School in Puerto Rico, and then she returned to New York a year later and graduated from a public high school.

Angelica said that she married early, but she went to college, starting out at Barnard and completing her bachelor’s and master’s degrees at GOTHAM College. After
working for a year, Angelica and her husband divorced. Shortly after that, she began working at Broadway College, where she has worked for the past 37 years.

Angelica has had a variety of educational experiences that have included the completion of formal and informal spiritual educational and coursework. Angelica told me that she is, “always doing something in terms of education.” Beside the requisite coursework that she has completed in order to attain her college degrees, Angelica has also taken Landmark Education courses, courses in Dimensional Microstructural Alignment; she has taken courses in metaphysics, and taken courses about the Bible. Angelica said that in order to improve her job performance as a counselor, she took numerous non-degree seeking courses in areas such as business, marketing, management, and Fortran, so she could better advise her students about their academic choices. Angelica said the following about the role of education in her life:

I remember working…a full-time job in OPENGATE and part-time work in the Curricula Guidance School of Business, and I felt embarrassed because the requirements for the job were usually something related to counseling. I had the counseling background, but the people that I saw, the people who I interviewed, and worked with were people in the school of business. And I had to be an advisor and tell them what courses they had to take and they would ask me questions. Here are evening students who are saying, ‘Ya know, I don’t know if marketing is for me or management is for me.’ And they would ask me these questions. I felt ridiculous so I took the whole core here in business. I took management and marketing and accounting and Fortran, just because I felt dumb
sitting with someone and not being able to do a good job, so I took it. And then on top of that I would sit in on classes. Sometimes at lunch time, I took classes in the Bible. I took classes in French. I took classes in Literature and Hispanic Studies. I heard that this one professor was very good and it turned out to be his last class. He died after that class, but I was always taking classes. I would sit in. I took Cobol. I’m a perpetual learner and uh, I’ve always been that way.

Angelica described herself as always being prepared with plan A, B, and C. She said that she is the type of person who is always running, and she readily takes on additional responsibilities. Angelica said that she is currently the leader of the OPENGATE program at Broadway College, and she has implemented three grants that she is working on concurrently.

Angelica’s description of her educational experiences spoke to her educational aptitude and thirst for learning. Angelica impressed me as an individual whose ability to multitask effectively has made her a complex and interesting person. After reading both of Angelica’s transcripts, it was clear that Angelica’s doctoral experience was most influenced by her spirituality, her love for learning and her support network.

**Components of Angelica’s Doctoral Experience.**

After speaking with Angelica formally on two different occasions, I surmised that the path to her doctorate was an exercise in spirituality and self-evolution. It was clear that Angelica was academically gifted and had always performed well at school. However, Angelica’s academic performance was also tied to her self-esteem in a way that
she felt compelled to achieve academically. During our first conversation, Angelica said, “...In the back of my mind, it wasn’t ok for me not to continue my studies.”

Angelica relayed that she always expected to get a doctorate. After she completed her master’s degree in 1973, she was hired by Broadway College as a counselor for the OPENGATE program, and she divorced at about this time. Angelica considered going back to school to pursue her doctorate, but she felt too neurotic. Angelica said that she wanted to continue her studies because she felt bad about herself and she felt that obtaining the title would make her feel important and that her life would then be miraculously ok.

Having recognized the error in her logic, Angelica went through a period of self-evolution through metaphysics and spiritual work. Angelica said that she was a devoted Christian as a child. While in high school, Angelica began reading books by Camus and Satre and she became inspired to live an existentialist lifestyle. Angelica then started teaching metaphysics and she began to reconnect with the Universe; she began to have faith that the universe was a friendly place. Angelica said that just when she started to let go of the idea of getting a doctorate, believing that it was ok not to have it, the idea of obtaining a doctorate seemed to present itself by the suggestions of others. Angelica stated:

So, while I was doing all of that and doing a lot of spiritual work, I was ok, not getting the doctorate. It was perfectly ok. It took me a long time to get to the point, ‘I don’t need this doctorate, alright, I don’t want this doctorate.’ The kind of work that I want is to continue with my spiritual work. And the minute that I let go of that, and I started teaching meta-physics, the minute I let go of that idea,
that I should get a doctorate, and I needed a doctorate, and I reached a point, I don’t need this at all, was exactly when I felt the Universe kept putting it in my face. I use to teach in meta-physics. If something keeps coming to you, there’s a reason, alright. And everywhere I went, Angelica, ‘You’re so smart. How come you never got your doctorate? Especially working at a university, Angelica how come you never got your doctorate?’ Then my boss was saying, ‘Angelica if you stop going to all of those classes that you go to and just put all of your energy into going to school, you would have had two doctorates by now.’ And then I promised him, I promise you. He made me promise I would think about it, and I said I will give you a different kind of promise. I’m going to meditate, and I’m going to pray. And if I’m supposed to this, I will get a sign, right?

Angelica received her sign. Angelica said that all of a sudden, her sister Graciella called and told Angelica that Dr. Swartz was recruiting students for a doctoral program at Hebrew University. When Angelica told her boss about Graciella’s telephone call, he said, “That’s the sign!” Angelica told him, “Nah, that’s not the sign,” but within a week, with her boss’ assistance, Angelica had her transcripts and three letters of recommendation in hand. Angelica applied, and about a week and a half later, Angelica received a telegram saying that she had been accepted to the Hebrew University doctoral program with a $60,000 fellowship.

Angelica shared that she had mixed feelings about being accepted into the doctoral program. First, she had a two year old son and was pregnant, just like sister Graciella. Second, two weeks before class was scheduled to begin, she was involved in a
car crash and her baby was still-born. Angelica said that part of her did not know how she was going to manage being married, having a two year old son, and pursuing a doctorate. However she turned things around: she dealt with the tragedy of losing her baby by pouring her energy into school.

In sum, Angelica felt that she was “guided” to pursue her doctorate. According to her, the opportunity seemingly “plopped into her lap” and she felt that she needed to do this. Because of her spiritual work, Angelica felt that pursuing her doctorate was not about proving something to herself. She would be with her sister Graciella during her doctoral course work, and Angelica felt that she was ready to do whatever was expected of her.

**Personal Factors as component- internal/external barriers/facilitator fear of rejection, self-efficacy, negative reaction, fear and drive to succeed**

When I asked Angelica about the barriers that presented themselves during her doctoral studies, Angelica said:

I think the biggest barriers in my life … have been myself, and it’s because I have been socialized first as a woman, second is like, somehow I was not good enough that I could do this. Fear has been the biggest barrier. Where this fear comes from? It’s been throughout my childhood. Through school I was always the token.

Angelica said that no matter how much she achieved academically in the past, there was a part of her that would make her feel as if she was not good enough. Angelica said, “I think to a certain extent we all have that for different reasons, but mine was always connected to the ethnicity.”
As previously discussed, Angelica realized that she had issues with her self-efficacy and at one point she thought that earning a doctorate would solve those issues. After working on herself spiritually for several years, Angelica applied to the Hebrew University doctoral program with a sense that she was being guided, and she no longer felt that she needed to prove herself by attaining a doctorate. Been even after she was accepted, she had doubts about whether she belonged. Angelica stated:

You start realizing, I’m not a noble prize winner, but I bring my gifts to the table, ya know. And I deserve to have a place at that table. There was a part of me that didn’t feel that I belonged at the table. I may be invited, but did I really belong at the table. I got there through affirmative action. I wasn’t smart enough to do this, ya know. They are just doing it because they just want to have Latinos for their numbers. And it’s true. They needed us because they were not getting any money. But that was not, it was Swartz that was interested in this particular area, bilingual. He has written so many things on this, um. But once I realized that, hey. You start thinking that other people are superior, like you don’t belong.

When I asked Angelica why she was unsure of herself, she said that she had doubts because she had never attended school while having a job and child before. She wasn’t sure if she could do it. However, after their first semester, Graciella and Angelica received the highest grades in sociology. Angelica also had one of her papers published during her freshman year. Angelica said that once she realized that she could compete with the Hebrew University students who were not Latino, she became confident that the Hebrew University experience would not be any different from any other school.
experience that she ever had. Angelica knew that she had always done well in school and she knew that she could do this.

**Social role component- role barriers adult learner, worker, parent, daughter, spouse.**

Angelica expressed that she was unsure if she would be a successful doctoral student because she was married and had a two year old son when she was accepted to Hebrew University. Angelica also took care of her terminally ill mother at first, until Graciella resumed care for their mother at Graciella’s house. Angelica balance all of these responsibilities while working part-time at Broadway College and taking 18-24 doctoral level credits at Hebrew University. In order gain a deeper understanding of what it was like for Angelica’s to balance all of her responsibilities, I asked her to describe her typical day. Angelica responded by saying:

Well, depending on what age David [Angelica’s son] was…taking care of David in the morning, his father would usually bring him to… I think he started with three days a week at the nursery school. If his father did not take him, I would take him to Lydia’s in my building and make sure everything was ok for him. Then, my sister would pick me up. Then we would go to classes all day long. Then in between, if we had in between classes, I would be in the library. I think we had classes, because I worked two days a week at Broadway. I can’t remember all of the schedule, but at that time I had my mother. And my mother by then, she had 24 hour care. There was a period of time that my mother did not have 24 hour care. There was a period of time that, ya know, I can’t remember, I think by then,
she had gone to Graciella’s because there was a whole series of things that you had to do for my mother. My mother could not go to the bathroom by herself. My mother could not get up. You have to, she had to be bathed, and in the beginning I did all of those things.

As Angelica’s son got older, Angelica managed to juggle her school and work responsibilities with her son’s extracurricular activities such as the attendance of parent teachers’ conferences and cub scouts. Angelica said that she was a den mother at one point and she even took her son to football and soccer practice. Angelica explained how she managed by saying:

…I remember running in the middle of the day, working downtown, to buy all of the badges for the kids, and then coming back, and then having to pick him up after school, and then going to boy scouts. I don’t know how I did it. I don’t think that I had that much sleep. I really think that I did not sleep a lot, because I studied like crazy.

Angelica described her doctoral experience a being a blur and she said that she could not remember historical events that occurred at that time. Angelica said that her priorities were her family, school, and then work and she said there was no down-time. Like Graciella, Angelica struggled to maintain her family’s expectations about conventional holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. Angelica said that it was important that she maintain these traditions for her son, because Angelica and Graciella did not have that growing up. Angelica said that she enjoyed decorating the house, and it
was a happy time. Angelica shared the following story about her first Christmas as a doctoral student:

There was really no down-time. Except in January when you had that brief thing...I remember spending time with my son, and my sister and I took a final. I don’t know if she told you this. My sister and I took a final in a course of socio-linguistics, sociology of language, and the professor, its Hebrew University, and they were giving the test on December 24th. It was like at 7 o’clock at night the exam. And Graciella raised her hand and said, ‘Professor Swartz, do you realize that the 24th for many of us is a holiday.’ He said, ‘Well, I could always give it to you on the 25th, or 26th. Pero [but] we finished the exam. She had two girls. I had David. It was like 7 o’clock at night. We went to Yonkers to Toys-R-Us, because we had not done the Christmas shopping for the kids. That’s how crazy it was. It was a tremendous sacrifice.

Angelica’s story illustrates how simultaneous, incompatible social role demands (role conflict) can interact to cause stress and guilt. Angelica felt guilty because she felt that she was compromising herself as a parent and she could no longer contribute at work the way that she was accustomed to. Angelica said that although her boss was very accommodating, she felt that she was not giving 100%.

Angelica expressed her doubts about being a good mother, but just like her doubts about her doctoral academic performance, Angelica realized that the guilt was coming from her own high expectations of herself. Angelica stated:
But, um, and sometimes the guilt of feeling like, am I a good mother? ‘Cause my idea was stop all this non-sense about going to school and just be a good mom, ya know. And that’s why if I hadn’t had the feeling that I was guided to do this, lead to do this, I would not have done it because I would have felt that I should have been at home with David and ya know, enjoying myself with him and raising him. So my biggest barriers for me have always been myself. Hasn’t really been other people, it’s been the things that I put on myself. I should be doing this, why am I not doing that. And most of the things that I do, I do thoroughly, intensely, so I felt like I wasn’t getting as much as I could have here.

More than once during our conversation, Angelica stated that her specific priorities while she was pursuing her doctorate were her son, school, her husband and work. Angelica believed that her priority system contributed to the eventual breakup of her marriage. She said that “almost everything went out the door.” Angelica explicated:

I think that fact that I went back to school did it. Because I think that um, he was not a scholar; he was not an intellectual type, ya know. And we had less and less to share. To this day he doesn’t know what my dissertation was about, because that wasn’t him. And when I met him, I was not in that place. So, when I needed to talk about things that were of interest to me, I could not talk to him. So we started going into different directions. We had less and less and less that we shared. And we were like two ships in the night, ‘cause he worked at night. He worked in night clubs and stuff like that. And so that was another thing, there were two different time zones. I would come when he was leaving. And I would
be taking care of my son. And then when he would come late at night, I would be leaving in the morning, so we always had like, it was like 24 hours in my house, but we had different shifts.

Later during our conversation, Angelica revisited how important Thanksgiving and Christmas was to her social life and family. Angelica said that among her friends, she was the one who hosted the parties. She said that she always had 25-30 people over for Christmas. Graciella would bring over a pork dish and people would come over Angelica’s house. Once Angelica started to attend Hebrew University, she could no longer entertain like she used to. The first Thanksgiving that Angelica did not host was her mother’s last. Angelica described what this felt like to her:

I was not able to see my friends like I use to. The kind of social life I had was limited. And I think that was also the parting, my husband had a social life at night. I didn’t. But my friends, I did not see them as much. You just don’t. You don’t have the time. And my mother died the first year. And I always felt bad, because her last Christmas, and she used to really look forward to that and we did not have one. I spent my Thanksgiving writing final papers. So you, it’s a sacrifice no matter which way you look at it. You have to choose. You have to make priorities of what is most important. My mother was very understanding. It’s in hindsight that I say, I did not know it was going to be her last Thanksgiving. That I think she would have enjoyed that. She always enjoyed Thanksgiving. And we did not do it. It was the first time we did not have a
celebration, so um, my friends, my dearest friends, were still around even though I did not see them as much.

One of the last questions that I asked Angelica was, if you could go back, would you change anything about your doctoral experience? Angelica said yes, that she would have celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas during her mother’s last year of life. Angelica said that her mother could not understand why Angelica and Graciella were going to school, and because of school, Angelica did not see her mother very much before she died. Angelica felt guilty about this.

Social role component- role facilitator adult learner, daughter, spouse, sibling, religious affiliate.

Although Angelica’s mother could not understand why Angelica and Graciella were pursuing their doctorates, Angelica’s parents did instill a value system in Angelica that inspired her to continuing her education. Angelica felt that by continuing her education, she was striving for excellence and thoroughness in terms of the things that she did. These are values that Angelica learned from both of her parents. Angelica said that her father was always a hard worker that never took time off of work, and her father was so punctual that you could set a clock by him. Angelica also said that her mother was a very responsible woman and these values helped Angelica educationally and throughout life.

Besides having been instilled with her parents’ strong work ethic, Angelica said that she had two overwhelming motivations that facilitated her doctoral experience. First, Angelica liked to learn, and she was accustomed to participating in the role of student.
Angelica indicated that her thirst for knowledge and her various interests served to provide her with structure. Angelica explicated:

Because if I had not done the doctorate, I would have been doing something else. That’s just the way I am. My friend Joe was the one who said, what’s wrong with you. If you just put all that energy into doing this one thing, you could have had a couple of doctorates already.

Angelica said that she did not pursue her education for a payoff, like the Christian notion of heaven that dictates that somewhere in the end, there was going to be a payoff. For Angelica, studying and learning was its own payoff, because she enjoyed it.

Angelica’s second most overwhelming motivator was her sense that she was being guided to complete her doctorate. Angelica felt that her spirituality and work in terms of metaphysics was really the glue. Angelica indicated that she had a spiritual core that she moved away from and then returned to. Once she returned to that core, she was able to do more because she was aligned. Angelica said that she is here for a purpose, a mission, and she is here to contribute. Angelica believes that it is not about her, it is about the work that she has to get done.

Angelica said that when she is aligned, it’s like dancing the mambo with another person: you’re in sync. When you need something, everything falls into place. Angelica provided examples saying, if you go to the library, voom, you pick up the right book. If you need to speak to someone, boom, they call. If you need a babysitter, pa, you get one. Angelica said that this is what she felt like while going to school at Hebrew University; everything fell into place.
During our second conversation, I asked Angelica to describe any rituals that were helpful to her doctoral process. Angelica explained that she would do metaphysical work every morning, connecting to what she felt was her hirer power; Angelica would meditate and pray. Angelica described the following ritual that she practiced:

Well in metaphysics one of the things I did, I used to have this notebook. I would go through, affirmations, and exercises that I would give in the classes I taught. One of them is really the choices you make every day which is, I chose to be healthy, I chose to be free, I chose to be true to myself, and I chose to be the predominate creative force in my life. I would start with that, then I did…a kind of attention training, open focus which is a form of meditation. I would do that every day. I would, in metaphysics, you look at the vision where you are going. You look at your present moment, where you are going to go. There’s this gap, so you hold the structural tension of where you are now and what you are going to do and basically I saw myself having done this already, having gotten the doctorate and then just being guided to do something powerful to help others. I mean that was really, but those were exercises and stuff that I would teach people, so when I went into the doctoral program, I sort of went in kicking and screaming. I really did not feel like I needed this. For such a long time it was important that I did not have a doctorate. And when I finally got it that it was perfectly ok for me not to get the doctorate, the universe was saying, guess what, now you’re going to do the doctorate. ‘Cause you’re going to do it for a different reason, so, but once I
focused I went through. So that was a ritual that I always did. But prayer, meditation, was always part of that.

Hence, prayer, meditation, and visualization were part of a ritual that helped Angelica through the doctoral process. Through the act of meditation, Angelica was able to clear her mind and focus her attention. She was also able to visualize herself having completed the doctorate and beyond.

In sum, Angelica was able to balance her social role and doctoral responsibilities, despite her self-doubt because she was academically gifted and motivated to learn. Angelica also felt that she was being guided spiritually, which caused things to serendipitously fall into place. Although Angelica’s marriage eventually ended in divorce, her husband did provide a support system that helped Angelica through the doctoral process. Because Angelica’s husband worked as a model and singer, his schedule allowed him to assist with the care of their son, David. Angelica described her husband as independent, and she said that if he would have required more attention, getting through the doctoral process would have been more difficult for her. Angelica also indicated that attending her doctoral program with her sister Graciella was extremely helpful because Graciella is pragmatic and would help Angelica move from one assignment to another (see the section Angelica’s Survival Tactics).

*Cultural component- barriers.*

*Gender role.*

For Angelica, guilt was an ever present feeling during her doctoral experience. In choosing to attend to her school responsibilities as opposed to those responsibilities
associated with being a wife and mother, Angelica frequently questioned if she was doing the right thing. When I asked Angelica if her sense of guilt stemmed from her ethnic background, or the social norms at the time, she said it was a combination of both. Angelica said that one of the negative influences was her mother’s belief that the most important thing in the world was to be a mother. Angelica’s mother felt that a woman’s mission and purpose was to be a wife and mother, and attending college was a more appropriate role for men. Angelica surmised that her mother’s beliefs were probably based on her mother’s upbringing. In the book that Angelica co-wrote with her sister Graciella, Angelica indicated that the greatest influence on the formation of her identity as a woman came from her mother who instilled in Angelica the following notions: “1) women are more responsible than men, 2) men have more freedom than women, 3) men have more fun that women, 4) motherhood is akin to sainthood, 5) mothers are expected to make sacrifices, 6) motherhood is the most important role for a woman, 7) an educated woman has more choices, and 8) women are not as strong men.”.

Angelica explained that it was always difficult being a mother and wife while attending Hebrew University, because she was raised to believe that these social roles were important and should not be compromised. Angelica said, “I’m choosing this over this other role and I had a lot of guilt; You know, am I doing the right thing?” Angelica said that had she not felt that she was being led spiritually to pursue her doctorate, she does not know how she would have done it.
No Latino role models.

One barrier that Angelica experienced while attaining her doctorate was the lack of contact with Latino role models. Angelica said that she had no Latino teachers or professors, while attending school in the United States; everybody was White. Even Angelica’s Spanish professors were not Latino, they were White. Angelica said of this experience:

You know, they take Spanish, and then they teach Spanish, and then they tell you that you can’t speak Spanish, alright. It’s their second language, it was your first language, and they tell you that you don’t speak Spanish. Um, it’s kind of hard to swallow.

Angelica said that it is difficult when you have had no Latino professors, when Latino’s are not represented on television, or as authority figures. Angelica also said that to the contrary, it is of great benefit to be exposed to individuals of your ethnicity that have professional jobs. Angelica suggested that this tends to promote the next generation of Latino professionals. Angelica said that the only time she was exposed to Latino professors, doctors, or other professionals was when she did an exchange program at the University of Puerto Rico. Angelica expressed that she was fortified with pride because she had an opportunity to have Puerto Rican professors there. When Angelica was hired by Broadway, she came to the job with a greater sense of pride because she did not feel like she was an exception. According to Angelica, “There’s a whole island and a huge university that there are plenty of us.” Angelica explained the experience of having a lack of Latino role models:
When every teacher you have is white, when God is white, Santa Clause is white, Snow white is white, ok, and also mainly men, right, you start thinking that it is not possible. And when I grew up, now there is a lot more role models on television, but when I grew up, I thought that people lived like Leave It to Beaver. The mother was always well dressed and Father Knows Best. Everybody lived in houses. It’s like my life was never reflected on anything that I saw in the media. You know, Dick and Jane and Spot. I lived in the projects. You never heard anything about projects. Somehow you felt that, you know, you did not belong there. Ya know. And anywhere you went, doctors, any kind of important person, or person of authority was never Hispanic. It’s only when I went to Puerto Rico, but we had White nuns, American nuns.

Graciella further explained the consequences when minorities lack role models to model after:

But then you start realizing, it’s like, I’m running a Black male initiative and every time the young men come in, I give them what I call nuggets, little things to take with them. And I say that we are going to have conversations and I tell them about a cousin of mines, Carlito, and he’s a doctor. And he studied very hard to become a doctor, from a poor family. But he married a doctor. And her father was a doctor. And her mother was the head of the biology department of the University of Puerto Rico. And her grandfather was a doctor, so guess what? When they sit down for dinner, and there is a family gathering, they talk about medicine. And Carlito and his wife had four kids. And they are all doctors except
for one who is a dentist who married a doctor, ok. The conversations, or if you
had a project to do for science, grandma could sit with you and do a whole project
with you, or mom. Or dad could tell you about it…So I tell the young men, there
are conversations that you never had. You have never been at the table to hear
these conversations. Forget about medicine, we talking basic things about college
and education and all kinds of things…If you’re in a family of accountants, they
start talking to you about taxes. Oh no, no, no, you don’t do that. Never put that in
your taxes. We don’t have that opportunity.

Angelica’s comments suggest that minorities, like Latinos and African
Americans, who do not have role models to follow will tend to question whether there is
something wrong with them or not, and they will struggle with having a sense of
belonging in certain environments. They will not benefit from being able to socialize and
have the conversations that take place when professional, ethnic role models are
available. Conversely, when there are role models available, Latinos and African
Americans benefit because they have the opportunity to imprint upon and emulate the
ethnic role model’s behavior, confidence, and dialog.

*Negative event by ethnicity.*

Angelica discussed her negative experiences based on her ethnicity, particularly
tokenism, in what Graciella and Angelica refer to as the “one and only” syndrome.
Angelica said that during her academic experiences over the years, she was always the
token, the only Latino, always the only one. Because of this, when Angelica attended
class, she often became the designated spokesperson for the whole Latino community.
Angelica said that it would never occur to a teacher to ask how White people feel about a topic, yet Angelica was expected to represent all Latinos. Hence, her behavior, her lack of anything would reflect upon other Latinos. This treatment followed Angelica as an adult into her work life. Angelica shared the story of her job interview for the position of OPENGATE Counselor at Broadway College:

I remember applying for this job, not this particular job, this institution, when I came here over 30 years ago, being interviewed for the job of Counselor for the OPENGATE program. I came in and there was a long table. There was a dean, another dean, there’s all these people who interviewed me. And this one dean kept saying, wow, summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, how did you do that? How is that possible? And I looked at him and I said, I am sure that you’re not asking me, how is it possible for a Puerto Rican to be able to graduate at the top of my class? I’m sure that’s not your question. You’re probably wondering what particular influences in my life lead me to success, is that more what you are trying to ask? And then he caught himself, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. But I looked over, and at the time, the dean that I eventually worked for was a Black man. Later on he told me when I said that, that that was it, that I got the job. He just looked at me, and I just looked at him. I think the inner eyes, we had this exchange like, is this guy for real? Is he kidding me? Does he really know what he’s asking? But I was very cool. I’m sure that’s not what you’re asking, and he said when I said that, he knew that that was it. I got the job. But I had a lot of that.
What Angelica was referring to when she said, “…I had a lot of that,” is the tendency for Latinos to be underestimated in terms of their academic abilities. For some Latinos, low academic expectations often become a self-fulfilling prophesy that is easier to prove than to disprove. Angelica’s experiences are also an example of how low expectations for Latinos can follow from the educational realm to the workplace, despite prior academic accomplishments that should prove to the contrary.

*Cultural component-facilitators.*

*Latino Cohort.*

Angelica said that she was able to tend to all of her social responsibilities while working on her doctorate because she had a support system, she was spiritually grounded, she attended class with her sister, and she also had the social and academic support of her Hebrew University Latino cohort. Angelica explained that you could see the group of Latino doctoral students from a mile away among the observing Jewish student population. According to Angelica, the differences between customs were noticeable. First, the Latino students came to school in the morning and greeted each other by kissing each other on the cheek. They were also loud and animated when they spoke to one another. To Angelica, the Jewish students were cold and formal. They were quiet and they appeared to be isolated among themselves. Second, there were distinct dietary differences. The Jewish students maintained a kosher diet, where dairy products and meats were often eaten separately. The Latino students were accustomed to eating and drinking dairy products together with meat dishes, like café con leche (coffee and milk) and sandwiches made of lechón (pork).
Angelica explained that the Latino cohort became very cohesive because the Jewish and Latino cultures were so different. The Latino students had a built-in study group among themselves, and if they were competing against each other, it was a healthy competition that kept them driving forward. I found it interesting that although Graciella felt that the Hebrew University’s academic environment was unwelcoming, Angelica perceived the opposite. Angelica felt that some of the Hebrew University secretaries enjoyed the cultural warmth of the Latino students. Angelica described her perceptions to me in Spanglish, a common term among Puerto Ricans, which means a combination of English and Spanish spoken together during the same conversation:

Well let me tell you they loved us at Hebrew University, our group, because the secretaries, who were all Jewish used to say, there is no group like yours. Because we would come in, how’s your daughter, tu sabe (you know), we would, we were very warm. And we would hug them and you know and we were very loud. Everybody else was quiet. With us as a group, we would come in talking, and ya know animated. And like I said, sometimes we had seen them twenty-four hours ago, pero (but) everybody besando (kissing each other), ya know hugging each other, hi and that kind of thing. And I think there was a warmth that we did not get from the professors. They were kind of cold. But they even started melting around us. There was a sense of unity and I don’t mean that the other students weren’t, but I think they were more isolated. And I think culturally, we are warm people and people who interact and are affectionate, and I think that is very helpful.
Angelica indicated that there was a tremendous community among the Latino students. They supported each other academically, and they each brought their gifts to the table. For instance, Angelica helped the group because she had a bachelor’s degree in psychology. In sum, each member of the Latino cohort contributed their individual strengths, to the benefit of the whole group.

Social component- facilitators.

Faculty status privilege and faculty support.

Angelica said that she was first and foremost guided spiritually to complete her doctorate. However, she had a network of people that made the process easier. Aside from having her husband’s, sister’s and Latino cohort’s support, there were a number of other individuals that provided support independent of social role and culturally related factors. For one thing, while Angelica was working on her doctorate, she was still a Broadway faculty member. Broadway as an institution allowed her to cut her hours from full to part-time, and she was permitted to do her school work at her Broadway office. Angelica’s boss at the time was extremely supportive of Angelica’s academic endeavors. In fact, he was the one who tempted Angelica with the prospect of attaining a doctorate when she was not interested. When Graciella presented Angelica with the opportunity to apply for the Hebrew University doctoral program, Angelica’s boss recognized the gesture as “the sign” that Angelica should enroll.

Living across the street from Broadway made it easier for Angelica to get to work, take care of her son, and gain access to a study area. Because of the close proximity, Angelica was able to participate in her son’s extracurricular events, or drop
him off with the babysitter who lived in her building. All Angelica had to do was to walk across the street and she had special access to Broadway College.

**Angelica’s survival tactics.**

Angelica employed a number of tactics that allowed her to balance her family and work responsibilities. Angelica also managed to have time for spiritual growth. In fact, Angelica became an ordained minister, while she was in the process of writing her dissertation. During my two interviews with Angelica, she described some methods that helped her.

Besides having an aptitude for academics, Angelica was optimistic and self-motivated about her doctoral work. Angelica was able to maintain her sense of motivation because she was able to take what she was learning and relate it to her life. In this way, learning was exciting, interesting, and meaningful. Having a strong mental attitude helped set the foundation for the academic challenges that Angelica would be presented with later on.

Angelica also had strong organizational skills and pinpoint focus. She made productive use of every minute and she organized her study area, her office at Broadway, to the point of physical compartmentalization. Angelica shared this description with me:

> They really did not have ATMs at that time. I had notes with me, everywhere I went. So while I was waiting on line at the bank, I was reading. There was no time I had wasted... I was very organized in my office. I got them to give me another desk. I had two desks in my office. So I had one desk here, and one desk here. And I had shelves here and shelves here, and two file cabinets. And in those
days, we were just getting computers. I really did not have a computer. Pero (but) what I had was, the worst thing in the world, that’s why I worked in my office, was to work in the kitchen, and bring all your papers and then have to put all of your papers back. So this side of the room was for my dissertation. So I had all my papers out, all my file cabinet for my research. And this side, when students came in, I would do my work, and the minute they left, I would go back. It was tremendous focus, alright.

Angelica said that having clear priorities helped her. From the time that she woke up in the morning, she was very clear in what she needed to get done, and as previously discussed Angelica made the best of support networks. Angelica said that she surrounded herself with people who wanted to succeed, and she also let individuals within her support network, like her sister, shape Angelica’s decisions. Angelica said that she tends to be a perfectionist who doesn’t know when to stop working on a project. Angelica’s sister Graciella is more pragmatic. Graciella would make Angelica move on from one project to the next because Graciella understood that effective time management was more important than the difference between getting an A or B. Angelica explained the importance of keeping pace:

Time management, but I mean especially on the graduate level, we had some of the most brilliant people never finish their doctorate because of incompletes. They just… and if it had not been for my sister, because I’m a bit of a perfectionist, I’d still be typing those papers now. She would say, ‘What are you crazy?’ ‘When you get your doctorate, do you think they’re going to look at your transcript to see
that you got a B in psychology of the aging? Do you think that they’re going to care?’ And she was right to put things in perspective. You know there are certain things that you do, and there are certain things that you don’t do, but being very organized. I found that the people, not the necessarily smartest ones got their doctorate. The ones that were able to one step at a time, one bite at a time, and organize their lives [got their doctorate].

Angelica and Graciella stated in separate interviews that had it not been for Graciella, Angelica would still be writing her dissertation to this day.

**Angelica’s advice to others.**

Angelica offered some advice to others who would like to pursue a doctorate. Angelica said that individuals need to be able to break down the larger goal, graduating with a doctorate, into smaller more manageable steps. Angelica asked, “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” Angelica said it’s like climbing a mountain, at first, you climb ten feet, you take a deep breath, you admire what you did, and then you keep going.

Angelica also said that the doctoral process needs to be demystified, and students need to realize that graduate school is just another level of school. Angelica said that when you graduated from high school it was a big deal, but then you went to college. When you graduated as an undergrad it was a big deal, and then you enter graduate school. You progress from one level to the next and it can be done.

Angelica said that Latino’s need to strengthen their sense of community and we need to create a community that empowers students. Instead, we pit people against each
other rather than to work together. Angelica believes that competition is not necessarily bad, but education is not a game. Education is not something we do to get a grade, it is a process. Angelica said that we are always looking at the destination rather than the journey. Angelica explained the conundrum in this way:

…We’re always looking at the destination rather than the journey. It’s like this carrot. If we tell people, study cause then you’ll get into a good high school. You better study, so you can get into a good college. You better study, so you can get into law school. You better put all those hours in, so you can be partner. It’s like this carrot keeps moving rather than engaging someone in the love of learning, in the excitement of learning, making that. Having students take that information and use it and to be able to empower themselves with it, rather than a means to an end.

Finally, Angelica suggested that the gaps in education need to be addressed. Education should be more holistic and empowering. According to Angelica, we have a 18th century way of teaching in the 21st century, a century of technology and speed, and students are disconnected somehow. Angelica believes that there is a big crisis in education. Right now Black and Latino students are vulnerable groups, with low educational attainment rates, and Latinos are the biggest, youngest, fastest growing group. Angelica said years ago, if you had no skills you could still gain employment; you did not need to know how to speak English in order to sew a dress, milk a cow, or build a bridge. But industrial jobs have become fewer and the demands for jobs that require technological skill have increased, yet we have an illiterate population that is growing.
Angelica said that the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, and she said that New York City has nine zip codes that are feeder places for all of the correctional facilities in New York State; Blacks and Latinos are over represented in this population. Angelica believes that the population of students that needs to be educated is not being educated, and if something is not done about this soon, our country will be in jeopardy.

**Summary: Angelica.**

In sum, Angelica said that she always wanted to get a doctorate, but if she would have attained her doctorate immediately after getting her master’s, she would have done so for the wrong reasons, to prove something to herself. Instead, Angelica waited, developed spiritually, and the opportunity to apply to the Hebrew University doctoral program with a $60,000 per year fellowship presented itself suddenly one day.

Angelica credits her doctoral success to the fact that she was guided spiritually. She also had a social network of people supporting her which included her sister, her husband, the Hebrew University Latino cohort, her boss, and she also had special access to office space at Broadway College. Angelica managed to overcome any barriers that presented themselves during her doctoral process, by being organized, focused, and she also had an innate love for and interest in learning.

**After the Interviews: bracketing my feelings about Angelica.**

The most difficult part about analyzing Angelica’s interviews was being able to separate her story from my own. Despite the difference in our ages, we have had similar experiences while growing up that served to fuel a sense of doubt and insecurity in both
of us. We also dealt with those insecurities in similar ways, with intense perfectionism. First, similar to Angelica, my parents strongly encouraged me to get married and to have a family. When my life did not take this course, my parents and other family members continued to stress the value of getting married and having children, as if this was the only suitable option for me. In the meantime, I continued to achieve academically. Although my parents did not necessarily discourage my academic path, they were clearly pushing me in another direction that I had less control over. This caused me to overcompensate in other areas of my life. Whatever I did, I did it intensely. I strived to be the best academically, athletically, and later I strived to be the best at my law enforcement career. For many years, the purpose behind my achievement was not always good. It was as if I was in competition with the world. My story was similar to Angelica’s. Although I believe that Angelica’s childhood was far more complex than my own, the result was the same. We both were driven to perfection in order to fix whatever else was wrong in our lives. We both accomplished things for the same wrong reasons. Where Angelica learned to make peace with herself through her spiritual work in metaphysics, I made peace with myself through my exposure to Eastern philosophy, specifically with the practice of Buddhism.
Figure 4. Components of Angelica’s Doctoral Experience

**Introducing Lissette.**

“So there is like this pipeline that in theory should be working but I mean the public school system...is really bad so then it is no surprise that students fall off at each stage...I think it is a huge issue that needs to be addressed.”

Lissette is currently a freelance writer and music artist who previously worked for Boricua Center at Prospect College as a GOTHAM faculty member. She was born and raised in Puerto Rico. During the time that I interviewed her, she was in her 30’s. Lissette attended her doctoral studies at the Graduate School of GOTHAM in New York, during the 1990’s, where she attained a Ph.D. in Sociology. Lissette was the recipient of a National Science Foundation Magnet Fellowship.
My Interview Experience with Lissette.

I conducted both of my interviews with Lissette at her apartment located in Harlem, New York. Lissette was available only during the evenings, so both interviews were conducted at approximately 6:00 p.m., both after I had interviewed Angelica at Broadway College. I freely admit that I had a looming sense of foreboding prior to going to Harlem to conduct the first interview with Lissette, because I knew that I would have to travel to Harlem by train and then walk through Harlem by foot. This foreboding came from my experiences having been born and raised in New York.

I was raised in Brooklyn, New York, and I moved to Florida at the age of 21, in the 1980’s. In the 1980’s, or as some would describe, the “pre-Mayor Giuliani” era, neighborhoods such as Harlem were dangerous places to be. To this day, I recall the sense of paranoia that I would experience taking the train, especially at night, as a youngster. Was I putting myself in harm’s way in order to collect the data for this study? I thought that the answer was yes. However, I told myself, “You’re a police officer! Armed or not armed, you’ll be able to sense and avoid danger if the situation presents itself.” With all the chutzpah that I could muster, I was on my way…

From Broadway College I took the 6 train to 116th street. I put the directions to Lissette’s apartment in my I-phone, which I studied prior to getting off of the train. I studied the directions in order to avoid looking lost. Once I was off of the train, I walked up the train station stairwell to find myself in front of a familiar site, a bodega. As a teenager, many a dramatic story played itself out in front such places. In the 1980’s, bodegas were places where teenagers and adults would loiter, drink beer, and cat-call
women. However, fast forwarding in time to 2010, there were only a pair of New York City Police Officers vigilantly standing on the corner instead.

I immediately felt relieved. I stood on the corner for a moment and tried to gain my bearings; what were those directions again? I turned to my left and noticed the towering row of projects across the street. I noticed that there was nobody hanging outside, not what I expected. To my right were two story buildings, just as Lissette had described. I began walking toward those buildings until I arrived at the address that I was looking for.

Because I was unfamiliar with the area during the first interview, I did not take photographs that time. However, after conquered my unreasonable fear of Harlem, I took pictures of the area the second time. Those photographs have frozen my recollection of the projects in Harlem during my visits there. This way, should I forget, I can always look at those photos and remember what a silly, distorted fear looks like.

With perception devoid of fear, I could see Harlem for the place that it really is. During my second visit, I felt comfortable being there, and I had no reservation being recognized as a tourist with camera in hand. After all, I was in Spanish Harlem, “Puerto Rico right here in New York City” as Lissette would call it, and I was Puerto Rican. I was perfectly safe and I was exactly where I belonged.

My Impression of Lissette.

During both my first and second interviews with Lissette, which cumulated to just over 2 hours, I found Lissette to be a welcoming free spirit who is daring enough to live an uncompromised life of her choosing. Her studio apartment was simply decorated, with
no curtains and blankets on the floor for a bed. There was stereo, a bookshelf, and a metal folding chair for me to sit on, and that was it. Lissette impressed me as every bit of the hippie she proclaims herself to be, free of the need to have the material things that would tether most people, free of pretense and social mask, free to live her life as her heart guides, rather than as her head commands...free.

**A Closer Look at Lissette.**

Lissette shared that she is the child of a Puerto Rican born father and a Cuban born mother who was raised in Bushwich, New York. Lissette’s parents met in New York, but moved to Puerto Rico to have Lissette. Lissette was born and raised in Puerto Rico by her mother, and Lissette described herself as being a college bound nerd while growing up.

After Lissette graduated from an experimental high school, of the University of Puerto Rico, she decided that she wanted a big challenge, so she applied to several Ivy League schools. Consequently, Lissette was accepted to Brown University at the age of 16, which she described as a difficult experience. Lissette said, “I thought I was very grown up; I did not realize I really wasn’t.”

Lissette graduated from Brown at the age of 20. She then went back to Puerto Rico to complete her Master’s at the age of 22. She returned to New York to complete her Ph.D., at the age of 28, believing that she would return to Puerto Rico. However, Lissette indicated, “I found that Puerto Rico is right here in New York City, so why would I go back to Puerto Rico if I’m already in Puerto Rico, so, I’m here; I’m still here.”
Lissette was specifically referring to Spanish Harlem where she has lived in the same apartment for the last 10 years.

**Components of Lissette’s Doctoral Experience.**

*Personal Factors as a component- internal/external facilitator interest and financial aid.*

Lissette described her doctoral experience as positive for two main reasons. First, Lissette knew what she wanted her dissertation topic to be when she applied: she wanted to continue researching her Master’s thesis topic. Lissette’s Master’s thesis was about the evolution of rap music in Puerto Rico and her project answered why rap music was popular in Puerto Rico at the time, but silent in the media. Lissette’s research revealed that in Puerto Rico, rap music was looked down upon because it was perceived as a foreign influence on Puerto Rican culture. In fact, some of Lissette’s sociology of music professors discouraged Lissette from writing about rap music because they perceived rap music as “crappy culture.”

During the process of researching her Master’s thesis topic, Lissette read books about Puerto Ricans and hip hop that were written by Juan Flores. In reading Flores’ books, Lissette learned that Puerto Ricans were part of the hip hop (rap music) movement during its genesis, which gave Puerto Ricans ownership of this genre. This inspired Lissette to continue her research in this area as a doctoral student.

Aside from her innate interest in the topic, Lissette also wanted to continue her research of rap music and hip hop culture because she felt that few individuals in academia were developing this topic, and she felt that there would be a demand for the
findings of her research. According to the book she wrote based on her dissertation, she saw an urgent need to write about this topic with greater historical accuracy. With this topic in mind, Lissette came to New York and met with Juan Flores, who Lissette said that she loved. After the meeting, Lissette applied to the Graduate School of GOTHAM, where she was accepted as a doctoral student, under the tutelage of Juan Flores himself.

Based on what Lissette told me, it was evident that her interest in rap music and the hip hop culture served as the basis for her drive to succeed, even in times of doubt. In Lissette’s own words:

I guess something else that was really helpful is that, probably because of the topic that I was dealing with, that not a lot of folks in academia were developing that topic. I got invited to a lot of conferences and to do talks, so I think that forced me to get into this mind frame that this is useful for people and people are hungry for this. I’m doing this because I enjoy it and I am curious about it, but there’s also a need and a want for it, so I think whenever I had doubts, I was tired, why am I doing this? Is this really worth it? Well it was obviously worth it not only because I would get a degree at the end, but also because it was work that people wanted to hear about.

Lissette said that the second reason that her doctoral experience was wonderful was because she had a National Science Foundation Fellowship, which paid for her school and living expenses, so long as she maintained her grades. Unfortunately, Lissette’s scholarship expired before she finished writing her dissertation, which presented Lissette with a financial barrier.
**Personal Factors as a component- external barrier lack of finances.**

Lissette appreciated having a fellowship that paid for all of her expenses and she knew this was a luxury, because she had to work as an undergraduate and Master’s student. Lissette loved that all she had to do was study. She was especially grateful because she saw how students struggled when they had to attend school and work simultaneously, especially if they had children. Lissette indicated that her scholarship ran out toward the end of her studies, which left her uncertain how she was going to finish her doctoral program. Luckily, Lissette was able to find work. Lissette stated, “…I figured it out, I worked and I was able to finish the dissertation and everything turned out fine.”

**Social role component- role barrier adult learner and worker.**

I asked Lissette what her every day doctoral experience was like after she started working compared to when she was just attending class full-time. She indicated that she found it more stressful in terms of dividing up her time. The time limitations that Lissette experienced were compounded by the fact that she was also burned-out on the topic that she was studying. Lissette said that she was questioning whether she was going to finish or quit when a friend of hers made a suggestion that encouraged Lissette finish her dissertation.

**Social role component- role facilitator friend, spouse, and daughter.**

Lissette said that she reached the point of burnout while writing her dissertation. After 5 years of attending hip hop events and clubs, Lissette was in dire need of a break, but she was afraid that if she took a break, she would quit. It was at this point that
Lissette’s best friend and kindred spirit Lauda made a suggestion that inspired Lissette to finish her dissertation. Lissette explained:

Um, and she was like ok, so, what if you decide to put a stop to it for now and just give yourself that time. I was like, no, I feel so bad about doing that, blah, blah, blah. So she was like, ok, what if you imagine that you were like at war, and you dressed yourself up in camouflage, and you locked yourself up in your apartment, and you don’t cook, and you don’t clean, and you do ridiculous stuff, and you dress up, and you give yourself two weeks, and whatever comes out is what comes out. And I was like, I like that idea, what if I did that, so that’s actually what I did. I gave her my phone, told her under no circumstances give me my phone back and that’s what I did and I finished it. I mean I finished up a good enough portion and then I revised that but I think that was a crucial moment and it was this crazy friend of mine who had a crazy silly idea. Like, I actually dressed up in camouflage. I think I liked that part best. It was so ridiculous and it lightened up the situation. I was like, whatever, whatever, I’m just going to do this.

Lissette described her friend Lauda’s support as indispensible. Lissette and Lauda are close friends to this day, and Lissette considers Lauda part of her family. Since Lissette has no family living in New York, depending on friends over the years has prevented Lissette from feeling isolated in the Big Apple. Besides her friend Lauda, Lissette also relied on her x-husband’s support to help facilitate her doctoral process.
Lissette indicated that she was married to a man named Pete during part of her doctoral process, and that Pete was an integral source of support. Since Lissette had no family living in New York, Lissette found it nice that all of Pete’s family lived there. Lissette explained how her relationship with Pete helped provide her with a sense of balance through her doctoral experience:

I got married to Pete who was a New Yorker and all his family were here, so that was really nice too. Like, to have that kind of family life. ‘Cause I think I can be a workaholic sometimes. I just get so wrapped up in doing my work that then I don’t let my brain rest and then it just creates all of this anxiety and it’s like this self-fulfilling madness. But when I was with Pete it wasn’t an option to be crazy like that. Like we had a relationship and we had a family that we had to go visit, check in with madrina, check in with his dad, um so, I think my brain would get rest that otherwise, if I had been by myself I probably would have been working myself to craziness so that worked out well. Um, yeah, Pete’s family is wonderful. So yeah so that was good.

Pete also helped Lissette with her research. He went to field research venues and interviews with Lissette, which helped Lissette to acquire the information that she needed. One barrier that Lissette experienced while collecting the data for her research was the sexual overtures that she received from individuals that she sought information from. This problem lessened when Pete was with her as Lissette explained:

… he used to come with me, to every, to all those clubs, that hip-hop overdose, he was there with me, like those years that we were together, which actually made it
a lot easier for me. One of my problems early on was navigating all this male dominated world. Here comes this young woman by herself, and I’m trying to talk history, and they’re trying to rap to me, and, uh, this is boring. This is not what I’m here for um, so having someone with me, that was my husband and who knew hip-hop really well, it made things a lot easier.

Not only did Pete help her with the process of collecting her data, he also offered to help her financially when her fellowship ran out. Lissette shared a tender experience with Pete as follows:

I think also that point when I was finishing, I was married and my partner was a wonderful man. We were always like very clear about your half, but when he said, when the fellowship ran out and when he said, if for some reason the working thing does not work out, like I can hold us both down. And I never thought that I would be in a situation where, that was just very tender to me and I felt like wow! Like, even if I fall flat on my face, and I’m going to work really hard and just try to hold my own which I did, eventually I did, but just knowing that he was willing to do that. That felt really good.

Despite Pete’s tenderness and support while Lissette was working on her doctorate, the couples’ marriage dissolved as Lissette was in the thick of writing one of her dissertation drafts. Lissette did not disclose the details of the breakup, and I did not probe further. About the breakup, she merely simply said, “…but yeah it worked out.”

Lissette indicated that even though her family was far away, they have always been a source of support. Lissette explained that her father and siblings were like cheer
leaders through during her doctoral process. However, based on both of my conversations with Lissette, she made it obvious that her mother has been her most profound source of support throughout her life. This was especially true as Lissette worked on her doctorate. Lissette described her mother as her top fan, support, and inspiration. Although Lissette has lived apart from her mother for many years, Lissette telephoned her mother every day during her doctoral experience, and she continues to communicate with her mother as frequently to this day. Lissette said, “Her being part of my everyday life was very important.”

Lissette indicated that it was her mother that made it possible for her attain her doctorate, particularly without fear of failure. Lissette said that in the back of her mind, she knew that she could “always go running back to mommy” if she failed. Lissette explicated that she was proud to do it on her own, but it was nice to know that if things did not work out that nothing horrible was going to happen. Lissette was confident that if she failed as a doctoral student all she had to do was swallow her pride and accept some help. Lissette relayed, “So I think that helped a lot to, knowing that the worst that could happen was actually not that horrible.”

Lissette explained that her mother felt like it was her job to push Lissette along far enough for her to be successful. Lissette expressed how important her success was to her mother stating:

I don’t know what we were talking about but she said something about, after. Oh no, I was getting emotional and I was like ay mami how am I ever going to repay everything that you have done for me, some drama and she was like. And she was
like, nah, but I did all of that so you could fly. So that’s the only thing you owe me, like I want to see you fly.

When I asked Lissette to explain her mother’s vision of “flying”, she said that she believed that her mother was referring to a bird because her mother would tell her that Lissette was the wind beneath her wings, like the pop song. Lissette could not recall the name of the song, but I know that she is referring to the pop song, Wind Beneath My Wings, by Bet Mitler.

* Cultural component - facilitators. *

* Latino role model. *

Besides family, Lissette’s doctoral process was facilitated by Latino role models starting with Juan Flores. As was explained in an earlier section, Lissette learned of Juan Flores while conducting research for her Master’s thesis. Lissette stated that at the time, he was the only scholar taking Puerto Ricans and hip-hop seriously from a historical perspective. Flores’ writing inspired Lissette to continue his research, as a next step to her own. Lissette described her decision to apply to the Graduate School at GOTHAM as a good decision, despite the fact that she had to enroll as a sociology major in order to work with Flores. Lissette indicated that her bent is more toward anthropology, but since Flores was at the sociology department, that’s where Lissette wanted to be. Lissette found Flores extremely supportive of her project. Lissette also found Flores easy to work with because he is interdisciplinary and tolerant of Lissette’s unconventional style. Lissette stated:

And it was a really good decision because I felt there were other folks in the department that were really supportive also. But they were more invested in the
discipline. Whereas, Juan, he comes from a literature background so he is very interdisciplinary and what he cares about is that the person does a thorough job so he doesn’t care if you cite all the traditional scholars of a certain discipline. So I loved working for him for that reason, and everybody else in that department had a little bit, no you need to use such and such sociologist and Juan would defend me a lot and try to convince folks like no, no, I’m really supervising her. Its ok she’s doing a thorough job. I mean we had to compromise a lot too, but I felt so good knowing that there was somebody that understood my project 100%... 

Lissette said Flores was instrumental to her doctoral success and the two became good friends. Lissette described their relationship as symbiotic. Lissette said that it really helped to know that Flores was not going out of his way to nurture someone like her, but that he was happy to do it because Lissette was innately interested in his work. Lissette said, “…because if he had nobody like me, and the other folks like me, he would be very sad; He would be like, so nobody is interested in my work-nobody is interested.”

Lissette also mentioned one other Latino role model that she had that was a professor at Ivy University with a creative flare. Lissette said of this professor:

I think that other young academics had a big impact on me and the one that stands out more in my head is Francis Negro Montanel. She is a professor at Ivy University and she is a film maker. Back then she had finished her Ph.D. but she was like working independently and getting grants. So in my head I was like, huh, here is this person who has this creative side to herself, who is well respected,
excellent writer and she is figuring it out, so I think folks like her were very inspiring for me.

Besides having mentors to look up to, Lissette was also fortunate enough to experience the camaraderie of fellow Latino graduate students.

Latino cohort.

Lissette indicated that unlike her undergraduate experience at Brown, she felt less isolate at the Graduate School at GOTHAM. For one thing, she had the support of other Latino individuals that were fellowship recipients; she called them the Magnet Fellows. Lissette relayed that the Fellows would meet periodically, once a month, or several times a month. Lissette found it helpful to be familiar with Latino students from other programs.

Puerto Rican music.

One important facilitator to Lissette’s success was her interest in “roots music” that she developed while collecting data for her dissertation. Lissette said her interest developed as a result of becoming burned-out on rap music and hip-hop. After all, she had been collecting data in this area as a Master’s and then as a Ph.D. student. As an alternative outlet, Lissette became interested in plena and bomba music, which eventually became her “next project”. Lissette is now a plena vocalist who is preparing to release her first music album. Lissette described the development of her interest in plena music in this way:

I really started, like early in my research, everything was hip-hop. I would go to hip-hop clubs, I would go to hip-hop events, ate slept hip-hop for about 5 years and then it became my work and then you know it became too much, so hanging
out times started being more with groups that would play plena, either at the clubs, or in people’s homes. There’s this beautiful place in the south Bronx called La Casita. It a place, La Casita De Chema, and it is a place where musicians gravitate towards, so folks are always hanging out at that place; they guard it. So my favorite thing about hip-hop is actually the dancing cipher…there is such a communal energy, like, I feel sometimes rapping is so about the person and the words, and dancing is more abstract and the energy just moves around more. So that having been my favorite part of hip-hop, when people play plena or when they are dancing and singing bomba, it’s a similar kind of energy. So that’s why I started getting into [it], ‘cause it was the same energy and the same intention that I liked about hip-hop except that I did not have to write about it, I did not have to think about it. I could just be there and enjoy it. So that became really important for me that yeah, that I had that outlet. And it also gave me a sense of what was going to come next because I felt stuck in hip-hop. But I was like, oh yeah but my next project is going to be about traditional music. Of course that would mean that I might get sick of traditional music and that I would have to get something else eventually down the line, but that felt good too, to be engaged. Even though one project was winding down, I was trying to wrap it up, and continue to something different, but then I already had other exciting thing going on that I could work on.

Because of Lissette’s apparent interest in music, I asked her if she had a background in music. Lissette then shared that her father is a musician who plays piano,
guitar, and the accordion. Lissette said that although she took piano lessons as a child, she had no other formal musical background.

*Ethnicity.*

For Lissette being Puerto Rican was helpful to her doctoral process because it helped her gain access to her the hip-hop/rap music culture and the people within it. Lissette stated that she often heard negative things about people who wrote about hip-hop, seemingly to their own benefit, without consideration of the people who they studied, but the fact that Lissette was a Puerto Rican woman writing about Puerto Rican history, lessened the criticism as Lissette explained:

> I mean there were times where I felt like it always surprised me that my ethnicity seemed to open doors for me so wide even though for example I heard so much criticism about other writers. That they write about hip-hop and then the go and write the book and then it’s their name and they get all the fame and people thought all the money, of course we’re talking about academic books that don’t really make any money, but that’s a whole other thing. Same thing with film makers, but I mean even though some people still resented me just because I was an academic, even if I was Puerto Rican, for most folks the fact that I was Puerto Rican kind of neutralized. It’s like one of our own, in people’s mind, it was, one of our own was writing our history, so this is good.

Lissette’s ethnicity no doubt helped her gain access to those individuals who were key figures in the evolution of hip-hop. When I asked Lissette to describe a particularly
good experience during her doctoral process, she shared with me what she described as a “powerful moment of her research.” Lissette said:

One of the most powerful moments of the research was for years, everybody kept talking about this woman called Diana that was one of the best dancers in Bushwich in the late 1970’s, early 1980’s. As typical in all these male dominated spaces, the wonder was that she could beat the guys. Like, she was that good. So the way that all these guys were talking about her, I was like, who is this Diana and where is she? Nobody knew how to find her…So eventually, I met somebody who knew her and he was like, I doubt it, Diana doesn’t do interviews you know but you can try it. See what happens. So, I must have called her at the right moment and she accepted, and to have that woman relive all these amazing experiences of being like an adolescent, and going through all these competitions…She was a hip-hop dancer. Her style was more like the Brooklyn rock style, the style that people don’t go down to the floor. It looks like martial arts ‘cause it’s all just simulation of fighting, so to me it was really exciting because of her personal passion and you could see in the way that she would talk about it and remember all these things, how powerful it was. But then to me as a woman, it was really satisfying to have this woman, who is this legend that everybody, even, men who often don’t give acknowledgement, even to the women that were present, but this woman was that good that no one could forget her. Her name just kept coming up, so I felt in awe. This is the legend, and I got to sit with her. The other thing that was really impressive for me is that even as an
adolescent she was out as a lesbian. So she would go to the competition with her girlfriend, so it was hanging out with all the guys with all their girlfriend and Diana with her girlfriend. I mean this is the 1970’s and the 1980’s? This woman is absolutely amazing, and I think that, I don’t know why she hadn’t wanted to give interviews, but she was really grateful that I wrote everything down. And I included her full, no actually I think I edited it down, it was longer, but one of the appendixes is um, my interview with Diana, Diana Steve Roberts, Diana. It was such a beautiful interview that I was like no, this has to be present in that book, um, so, and I had the feeling that she was happy that somebody cared to put it down on paper.

This is an example of what Lissette was able to do because she had access to the hip-hop cultural, largely because of her ethnicity, and partially because of her gender. In sum, Lissette was able to develop a communication vine that culminated in her interview with the inaccessible, Diana.

**Becoming a Latina role model.**

The fact that Lissette is a Puerto Rican, with a Ph.D., who lives in Harlem, is a testament to the fact that she is a role model in her community. Not only has Lissette attained a doctorate, she is also the author of two books, one based on her dissertation, and she is a budding music artist. When I asked Lissette about the impact of her accomplishment upon her community, meaning Harlem and the GOTHAM community, Lissette stated about her impact on the Harlem community:
I mean my neighbors. I get such a kick out of my neighbors. They’re so proud and when somebody doesn’t know me, oh she’s a writer, oh she’s a professor and it is like I was their daughter, like this pride. So yeah, I think that was another incentive. There’s the family incentive that I knew that they would be very proud of me, but I think the neighbors, um, yeah it is like a whole other dimension of feeling like it would be useful not just for me.

Lissette described what it meant to her to be a role model while she was a faculty member at Prospect College:

I think that it was a factor that helped [knowing her accomplishments would have an impact on her community]. It was that same feeling that what I am doing is useful and that my community needs me to do this. They need me to write the book, and they need me to exist. Like, I remember the feeling, this was after I got my degree, but teaching students at Prospect. Like, I just had to walk in and they just had to go through that first shock of this woman that looked like any of the other woman in the class, pretty much, and, oh this is the professor? Oh, she’s got a Ph.D.? Oh, she wrote a book? ...It was this automatic inspiration. They’re used to the older white male professor, and here is this other kind of professor. So I felt that half my job was done the minute I walked into class, and they saw me, and they went through their, oh, she’s a professor? So, that felt really good.

During my interviews with her, Lissette said that it is gratifying to be in the position to pass on her interest in rap music to others, and she feels good about being part of a history of scholarship that was relevant to the community at large. Lissette realizes
that when she teaches or does public speaking events, students now feel about her, the way she felt about her professors. Lissette humbly expressed that she is proud to be able to “pass the baton” the next generation of scholars.

*Social component- facilitator.*

*Gender.*

While Lissette was collecting the data for her dissertation, her gender was both a blessing and a curse. Because the hip-hop culture is male dominated, most of the individuals that Lissette interviewed were male. Lissette indicated her gender actually helped her to gain access to these individuals because they were often romantically interested in her, but on the other hand, their sexual overtures were annoying (she referred to them as boring). When her husband Pete started attending interviews with Lissette, the sexual overtures lessened, but Lissette was still able to gain access. Lissette explained:

I mean the gender thing, I realize that sometimes I would have access to certain places and people because I was a young women that they would be potentially interested in. These were men. So although part of me resented that, another part of me was like, well, if that’s the reason, whatever, as long as there is no crossing the line to disrespect, they could think what ever, hope, whatever, who cares. If they want to give me an interview because of that, let them, so that was one side of the equation, but I did notice that once I got married and my husband and I were going to places together, I actually felt a lot more comfortable. Partly because he would defuse that kind of interest or energy, but men, I don’t think
that men were any less likely to want to talk, especially because Pete was a New York raised Puerto Rican who had been a B-boy when he was younger, so it was a different configuration that there was this couple that they still wanted to talk to. So I know that there were some little gender related issues there but nothing that was ever a big deal or a big problem.

**Lissette’s Survival Tactics.**

One of Lissette’s survival tactics was the “war” exercise that Lauda proposed. For this exercise, Lauda suggested that Lissette dress up in camouflage, and create as much of a distraction free environment as possible. This exercise worked for Lissette because figuratively speaking, Lissette was at war with the distractions in her environment. Some of those distractions were self-created, like her sense of burn out about her topic, and others stemmed from her routine responsibilities, which at the time, included having to work. So what exactly was helpful to Lissette? She did not cook, clean, and she did not answer her phone for two weeks. By creating a distraction free environment, Lissette was able to complete a good portion of her dissertation.

As previously explained, another of Lissette’s tactics was having plena and bomba music as an outlet. Lissette would also go jogging or take long walks. Lissette said that jogging would help her body produce endorphins, and she also found it helpful to walk to Prospect, when she worked there, rather than to take the train. Lissette said:

…In fact, when I was working a Boricua Center, I used to walk from here to Prospect and back so that like, in the morning, it was like walking down and it felt good. And everybody is hunched down in the subway but I’m just walking. I
would get up early enough so that I would have time to do that. So I was getting my exercising and I wasn’t suffering down in the trains with everybody else and in a bad mood.

**Lissette’s Advice to Others.**

When I asked Lissette to offer suggestions of how to address the underrepresentation of Latino’s at the Ph.D. level, Lissette mentioned that GOTHAM recently started a Puerto Rican Latino faculty initiative because they were concerned that the faculty to student ratio was terrible in terms of diversity of the faculty. Lissette said:

They started this initiative partly because the faculty is needed, but it impacts the students directly. It is like that little generation, escaladita [step ladder]. You have Latino professors that serve certain needs that Latino student specifically have, grad students and undergraduates.

Lissette also indicated that the educational pipeline needs to be addressed, because students are falling off at every level. According to Lissette:

So there is like this pipeline that in theory should be working but I mean the public school system, especially in New York, is really bad so then it is no surprise that students fall off at each stage then more folks are falling off, so I think it is such a huge issue that needs to be addressed.

Lissette also suggested that there are issues related to academic institutions, but ultimately the underrepresentation of Latinos with doctorates is a systemic one. Lissette stated:
Then there is the exact opposite angle which is this faculty retention/recruitment program. Um where you treat your faculty better or make better efforts to keep those folks. Those same folks are going to attract other scholars that either share the same academic interest or just because they want a mentor in terms of background that can help them out. So there’s a systemic aspect of the problem like the public school education system is not doing right by the students. The University system is not doing enough to really have enough of a population of Latino and Puerto Rican faculty, but then it is also like on the individual to know that they’re important and they’re of service. So if you are already faculty, you know you have to take care of those students that look up to you or that need you for whatever reason.

Finally, Lissette suggested that more Latino scholarships be created so that Latino graduates can focus on their studies:

I mean we need so many things. If I could start naming things, there would be like this big fund for the next level of grad students. It’s insane what the grad students are expected to juggle during graduate studies, especially Puerto Ricans and Latinos that usually families are involved in the picture, and then it’s like work, and family, and grad school. It’s just too much. There are some programs and I’m a benefactor of that, but it’s such a small percentage of folks that it’s no surprise that the economic factor is a big one… but aside from that, from all different angles, we need changes.
Summary: Lissette.

In sum, Lissette’s doctoral experience was a positive one. On a personal level, Lissette was driven to succeed by her interest in her dissertation topic. However, one barrier that Lissette had to overcome was a lack of finances. Lissette’s fellowship ran out while she was in the process of writing her dissertation. This caused Lissette to doubt whether she would successfully complete her doctoral program. However, Lissette was able to gain employment and complete her degree.

The only barrier that Lissette reported was having to work while she was in the process of completing her dissertation. This caused Lissette to have to make tough choices about how she divided up her time. However, with the support of her friend, Lauda, her then husband, and her mother, Lissette was able to overcome those obstacles.

Other facilitators to Lissette’s doctoral experience included having assistance from Latino role models like Lissette’s mentor, Juan Flores. Lissette also benefited from being able to socialize with other Latino Magnet Fellows, so she did not feel isolated during the doctoral process. Lissette said that her ethnicity and gender helped to facilitate the process of collecting the data for her dissertation. As a Puerto Rican female, Lissette was able to gain access to the hip-hop culture. Lissette also shared that becoming a role model to her community helped her doctoral process because she felt a great sense of purpose and usefulness.

After the Interviews: bracketing my feelings about Lissette.

After interviewing Lissette twice, I reflected on the contents of her interviews, which were substantially different from the responses that I received from Angelica and
Graciella. Angelica’s and Graciella’s stories were so rich and complex, I could not help but compare the stories of the other participants with theirs. Because I chose Havinghurst’s social roles as the conceptual nexus connecting my study to the field of adult education, I have to admit that it was the social role aspect of Lissette’s experiences that I was interested in exploring. However, Lissette’s doctoral experience was not only different from Angelica and Graciella’s, it was also very different from the experience that I was having. Lissette was a Magnet Fellow who’s only responsibilities while she was working on her doctorate was her school work and her responsibilities toward her independent husband. I don’t know if I was disappointed in Lissette’s experiences or just plain jealous, but it was at this point that I realized that there was more to a person’s doctoral experience than the juggling of social roles with school work.

After my first interview with Lissette, I could tell that my research was going to go in an unexpected direction. I also realized that I did have research expectations; I was expecting certain results, and I was not comfortable with that revelation. But then I realized that because my research was taking an expected course, I was able to see components and variables of the doctoral experience that I had not anticipated. At this point, I became excited rather than fearful of what the interviews with the other participants might reveal or not reveal.
Introducing Hector.

“What are you imagining is such a monster that isn’t?”

Hector is currently a GOTHAM faculty member who is an OPENGATE Program Counselor at Prospect College. He was born in Puerto Rico and raised in New York. During the time that I interviewed him, he was in his 60’s. Hector completed an Education Doctorate distance program offered by Mardigras University, located in Louisiana. While attending his doctoral studies, Hector was employed in his current position at Prospect College.

My Interview Experience with Hector.

I interviewed Hector twice. Both of the interviews took place at his office located at Prospect College, at approximately 10:00 a.m. My interview with Hector was the first of three on my second day of interviewing. Based on the lessons that I learned the day
before, I decided to employ a different interview strategy. On the previous day, I made
the mistake of trying to recreate a regular workday, starting with my attire. I wore a pair
of slacks, a sweater, and a comfortable pair of Clark shoes, with a reasonable two inch
heel. I had purchased these shoes just for the occasion. I also made the mistake of
packing my knapsack too heavy, because I wanted to make the best use of my downtime.
With efficiency rather than practicality in mind, I stuffed my knapsack with all the things
that I thought I might need. My knapsack contained my laptop, my transcription foot
pedal, a copy of my dissertation, a few books, my digital recorder, and a few extra
batteries. I also decided to carry my heavy Brighton purse because it contained several
things that I did not want to sort out. The load was bearable until about mid-after noon,
and by the end of the day, I was lucky to be able to peel off my shoes.

The next day, I wore a pair of black loafers (what I wore for the rest of the week),
I emptied my knapsack of everything except my laptop and digital recorder, and I placed
my cash, one credit card, my room key, and my metro card in a small, cheap, $10 dollar
cloth handbag that I draped diagonally across my chest. Having remembered some of my
Brooklyn safety tactics, I kept the small purse flat and under my coat in order to deter
someone from being tempted to snatch it. In short, I started my second day of interviews
several pounds lighter, and two inches shorter than I had the first day of interviews.

I took the train to Prospect College and got off at 68th Street. This would be the
location for all three interviews on this day. I went through the revolving doors of the tall
building to be confronted by security at a row of turnstiles. I presented my U.S.F.
identification, my drivers’ license, and I was allowed to enter. I took the elevator to the
tenth floor. When I turned to the right, I noticed the pane of glass of what appeared to be a conference room with a decal that said OPENGATE Department. Realizing that I was at the correct location, I relaxed and noticed that the walls were painted a drab pale olive green common to government institutions. When it was time, I knocked on Hector’s door, which he had closed prior to the interview.

**My Impression of Hector.**

My first impression of Hector was that he is a proud Nuyorican. In other words, Hector is Puerto Rican who identifies with being raised in New York. When I addressed him initially, I made the mistake of calling him Harvey, the American pronunciation of Hector. Hector quickly corrected me and said, “My name is Hector.” I said, “Oh, you go by Hector.” Hector replied, “Of course. No, you just destroyed me.” At first I was embarrassed for pronouncing his name wrong, and then I felt silly for being embarrassed in front of such a laidback person.

In fact, Hector struck me as one of the most unfazed individuals that I have ever met. After reflecting on my two brief interviews with Hector that totaled 44 minutes, I came to understand and respect his point of view. At first, I was irritated with Hector because he had so few issues to report about his doctoral experiences, but then I realized that what he did not say was actually more profound than what he did say. What I came to understand is that Hector simply does not take issue with much of anything and this made him seem eerily well adjusted me.
A closer look at Hector.

Hector shared that he was born in San Juan Puerto Rico and came to New York when he was 2 years old, and he described himself as a lifelong New Yorker. Hector said that he went to Puerto Rico to complete the 4th grade, he returned to New York for the 5th and 6th grade, and then returned back to Puerto Rico once again for the 7th grade. Hector indicated that he is a product of the New York City public school system. He graduated in 1966 with a bachelor’s degree from GOTHAM College of New York. Hector attained a Master’s Degree in Counselor Education in 1975, and he began working on his Education Doctorate in Student Development from Mardigras University in 1987. Mardigras University’s main campus is located in Louisiana. Hence, the program that Hector graduated from was a distance program that entailed course work that was offered at Prospect College during the Fall and Spring semesters, and at Mardigras University for three weeks during the Summer semesters. Hector completed the Mardigras University doctoral program in 1994, seven years after beginning.

Hector said that he is a professor at Prospect College in the OPENGATE program, and his basic function is counseling. Hector relayed that he teaches career counseling and freshman orientation courses at Prospect and he also teaches outside of the GOTHAM system. Hector indicated that his dissertation was about block programming (more commonly recognized as learning communities or cohorts), which he initiated the use of in 1975. Prospect adopted block programing for all of its students in 1993, and Hector said that currently, half of GOTHAM practices block program. Hector referred to his dissertation as an action dissertation.
Components of Hector’s doctoral experience.

*Personal Factors as a component- internal barrier procrastination.*

Hector reported only one major barrier to his doctoral process: himself. Hector completed his course work with few problems and then stalled when he had to write his dissertation. Hector explained that he was working, and raising a family, so the last thing on his mind was writing his dissertation. Hector described his avoidance for writing his dissertation as “pathological procrastination,” because not only did Hector procrastinate, he lied to others about his progress. When others would ask Hector about the progress of his dissertation, he would say that he was going to work on it “tomorrow.” Hector said that he only finished his dissertation because he was embarrassed by his lack of progress. Hector explicated:

Well essentially it took 7 years because of how incredibly lazy I was in terms of writing my dissertation. You have to understand, I had collected my data before I even got into the program. I had conducted the longitudinal study on my own, so when they saw that there was this guy up here changing the system with data in hand. It wasn’t like I had to do a project, I had done it. I had organized 16 faculty members. There were 80 students in the experimental group, 50 students in the control group. They had been chosen randomly. I mean, my background in psychology, my Master’s, it was all there, so I knew what to do. So Mardigras University thought, it was like wow, this guy is doing cutting edge work and to them, they were extremely happy. But I, being lazy, you have to understand, I finished the course work and everything else in the first three years. Then to get
me to write the dissertation took me four years. I would lie to them. They would say, are you writing? I would say yeah, I’m writing. I’m almost there. No I wasn’t writing. I was having a ball. Finally after seven years, I said you know what, this is getting embarrassing and I knocked it out.

**Social role component - role barriers adult learner, worker, parent, spouse.**

Hector denied having any substantial barriers to his doctoral process, other than his pathological procrastination. However, Hector did say that because he was working and raising a family, working on his dissertation was the last thing on his mind. When I asked Hector to describe his worst experience while he was working on his doctorate, he explained that he did not enjoy having to live away from home three weeks out every summer, for three consecutive summers. Hector said that although this was not harsh, for a New Yorker to have to live in Mardigras University for that length of time was less than ideal. Hector further stated:

> I am a New Yorker and to go from New York to Mardigras University we’re talking, this is the middle of nowhere, ok. And to be there for three weeks, not to be there with my kids or my wife or New York City, all my comforts, that was the worst part, just being down there. And all of that was ok except that I wanted to be home in New York with my family.

In sum, Hector described two barriers to his doctoral process: his pathological procrastination and the fact that Hector preferred to be in New York with his wife and children rather than Mardigras University, Louisiana for three weeks in the summer as
the program required. Barriers aside, Hector described several facilitators to his doctoral experience.

*Cultural component- facilitators.*

*Institution culturally accepting.*

One thing that Hector described as helpful to his doctoral experience was the sense of acceptance that he felt by the Mardigras University, Louisiana students, while the distance students from New York were house there. Hector said that the cultural differences between the New York students and the Mardigras University students were evident behaviorally and in terms of values. Despite the obvious differences, Hector said that the students from New York were not negatively impacted. Hector described the situation as follows:

…Well there was the group that we brought down, and there were the people who lived down there, the students themselves. There was a culture clash. So for example the first day that we went down there we actually sat at a table. We pulled out coins. We started playing cards for nickels and dimes. We bought some beers, and some wine, and we were having a ball when they walked in, the people from the south. They were shocked. We were drinking alcohol. We were playing cards. They were in shock. I don’t know if you’re familiar with Mardigras University, but Mardigras University is a historically black college, ok, so what happened was, when they looked at us, these southern people are very, very, religious for one thing. I mean the first time we were there, I was shocked. I look out my window and there was a group of 17, 18 year old freshman lined up in
their Sunday best waiting for a bus to go to church. To me, it was, people still do that? Yes. To them we were, like, I mean when we went bowling, they had a little bowling alley right there on campus. We were loud. To them it was like, look at these people, look how loud. They are very gentile type of people. They speak low, slowly. And we were hey. In other words, New York City invaded the south. It wasn’t like they tried to get rid of us or anything. You could tell by their looks. What the hell are these people doing? But again, it wasn’t anything that was negative or that impacted on us in any kind of a way.

Hector shared another humorous instance describing the cultural differences between the southern and northern students. Hector said:

I’m in the Deep South. Louisiana is Deep South, ok. And so, I remember going to a McDonald’s with this white kid. One of the white faculty members and we were on line with a bunch of people, and he says, and you know there are a lot of rednecks out here. And I froze, I said, oh my God. What is this kid saying? All of these people look like rednecks to me. Ok, so.. I just look at him, but aside from that kind of humorous moment that was it. It was, it’s Louisiana but it is the United States. I felt like I was home.

Another facilitator that Hector experienced was the fact that Prospect College and Mardigras University brought the Mardigras University program to New York and made completing the program as convenient as possible for the students. The faculty members were also very supportive.
Social component- facilitator.

Institutional support: ease of program.

Hector described a number of facilitators created by Prospect College and Mardigras University. Hector said that it helped a great deal that instructors were hired to teach courses at the Prospect College Campus. The program was designed so that the distance program students attended course work in Louisiana only three weeks during the year, in the summer. Hector said the convenience of the program facilitated his doctoral process.

Peer Networks.

Hector indicated that attending his doctoral program with a cohort of students from Prospect College was helpful to him. This was especially true when Hector had to attend course work in Louisiana for three weeks in a row. Although he had to be away from his family, and New York City, he was at least able to attend classes with individuals who he was familiar with.

The findings of Hector’s dissertation research on block programing supports Hector’s positive experience with attending courses with a cohort of students. During my interviews with him, Hector explained the benefits of block programing, and how it increases the chances of success for college students, which is why block programing is administered at nearly half of the campuses within the GOTHAM system. Hector explained how block program works:

Block programming… Usually…students come to a college as freshman and they prepare their own programs and they end up with a variety of students in different
courses. What we did is we said why not put them together as a group for one semester. Give them the same four courses. They form a block of students within the same program and what happens is that they now created an instant community, so while most freshman report that they feel lonely, that they feel like they are not connected, once the student is in block programming, in a day or two, they form their own instant community. And what we find is, in those communities, learning is enhanced. So for example, all my data goes back more than twenty years. Our students graduate at significantly higher numbers if they have that first semester of block program. In other words what we do is we look at ways in which we can facilitate the academic and social adjustment of students to the college environment and the simplest most elegant way of doing that is block programing. Throughout the country block programs are also known as learning communities, freshman cohorts, but essentially it is all the same thing, grouping a bunch of students for one semester in order to facilitate their social and academic adjustment.

Hector further explained:

It was simply facilitating that first semester that made it possible for students to then adapt and go on and graduate. So it was a simple idea. I mean talk about an incredibly simple idea that I had back in 1974, wrote about it in 1975, I implemented it in 1982, I initiated a longitudinal study in 1989, I provided Prospect College with the data, three years later. Prospect College decided that they wanted to try a block program so they implemented it on an experimental
basis. They found that it was so good that two years later they started programming … New York GOTHAM’s board of trustees thought it was a great idea so they recommended it to the rest of GOTHAM and right now, 50% of GOTHAM uses block programming.

**Hector’s Survival Tactics.**

Hector said that he was able to remain unfazed by his doctoral experiences because he has an internal locus of control. Hector explained that because of this, he is not affected by what happens external to himself. Hector said:

You know about internal vs. external locus of control, being field dependent, being field independent. I am truly one of those people that has an internal locus of control. In other words, the environment does not really strike me all that much.

**Hector’s Advice to Others.**

Hector offered some advice to others who would like to pursue their doctorates. First, he advised against procrastination, particularly while in the dissertation writing phase. Hector further explained:

…Every day write something. Don’t do what I did, which was, unless I was going to write a whole chapter, I wasn’t going to write anything. And of course I hated writing a chapter, so I wouldn’t write it. So, to me it was all or nothing and I did nothing. And I think that is the wrong type of choice, all or nothing… I would recommend, write a little bit every day.
Hector indicated that a day should not go by without writing, so that the dissertation does not become overwhelming at the end. Hector also said that attaining a doctorate requires persistence and focus, but similar to Angelica and Graciella’s advice, Hector indicated that the process needs to be demystified and needs to be perceived as attainable. Hector further explained that that many people become intimidated by the process and view obtaining a doctorate as daunting until they are engaged. Hector opined that attaining a doctorate is no more difficult than attaining a bachelor’s or Master’s degree. It is simply the next step. Hector stated:

I think a lot of people look at it and say my God it’s kind of an obstacle that I may not overcome because…the way they make it seem you gotta do all this work and then you have to find a topic and you got to write about it and it must be written about in a scientific way, and you gotta collect. It seems overwhelming until you start to do it. Once you start to do it, you chew off a little bit at a time, and so it happens, and so the only advice I would have for other Hispanics is don’t let it, because it seems daunting, don’t let it stop you. If you persist, you’ll get it…I know this is going to sound really crazy but this is what I found in my experiences. I found that my bachelors’ was harder to get then my Master’s. Master’s was a breeze and I found that my Master’s was a little more difficult than my doctorate. Then once you get on that trend, when you need to go forward it doesn’t get harder, it gets easier. I did not have to work anywhere as near as hard for my doctorate as I did for my bachelor’s degree.
Hector said that Latinos should not be intimidated by the idea of getting a doctorate, and he offered the following potent message to others:

What’s stopping you? What? What are you imagining is such a monster that it isn’t? Ok. What, Why do you stop yourself, would be the message.

One of the last questions that I asked Hector was for his advice about how the representation of Latino doctorates could be increased. Hector said that it was a matter of stimulating interest in advance levels of education through information dissemination, and by encouraging Latino’s to attain their associates degree prior to applying to a four year college. Hector also said that Latinos should start thinking about attaining a doctorate early in their academic careers. When I asked Hector how the information should be disseminated he said:

Oh I would imagine through programs like, right now in New York City, because Hispanics are all over the country more and more the media is coming up with shows for the Latino Nation and so on…Also in graduate programs and undergraduate programs, if you are Latino, start thinking about it the doctorate. Why not go for the highest?

Hector expressed the need to reach as many Latinos a possible about the importance of advanced education. Besides reaching out to the Latino community by way of the media, Hector suggested that information could be disseminated via Latino committees and organizations as well, with the goal that the information be disseminated as far and wide as possible. Hector stated, “I would use the shot gun approach, which means straight out as far and as wide as you can.”
Hector also suggested that Latinos pursue an associate’s degree prior to attending a four year college. Hector’s opinion is based on his experience counseling Prospect College students to success. Hector stated:

I can tell you that of the students that come to me, about 40% will graduate from Prospect. The 60% that do not, I believe most of them would have graduated from Prospect had they first attended a community college, built up their skills, and build up the 60 credits and then as a more mature individual, come back to the senior colleges. If that were to happen, there would be a lot more Puerto Ricans with bachelor’s degrees and then they would be able in turn to go on to advance degrees.

Hector further stated that unfortunately, many people have been sold on the idea that going to community college is undesirable, because there is a stigma that community colleges are for students that are less intelligent. Hector extolled that his students would graduate at higher rates if they attended community college first, prior to attending Prospect, and Hector concluded that, “I think that if we want to see that pipeline expand we really need to convince our students that community colleges are perhaps the very best first step in obtaining a grad degree.”

**Summary: Hector.**

In sum, Hector indicated that his doctoral experience was positive, and he described the barriers that he faced as conquerable. Hector stated that the biggest barrier that he experienced was his lack of desire to write his dissertation after breezing through three years of course work with minimal problems. Hector’s avoidance toward writing
his dissertation resulted in what he termed as pathological procrastination. Not only did Hector avoid writing his dissertation, when his wife and others asked him about his progress, he lied and told them that he was “working on it.”

The only other barrier that Hector identified was being required to attend three weeks of course work in Mardigras University Louisiana for three summers in a row. Hector said that he did not appreciate having to leave his wife, children, and beloved New York City, for three weeks, especially since Mardigras University was so culturally different. Hector said that although the students at the Mardigras University, Louisiana campus behaved differently and had different values from the New York students, the Mardigras University students and institution were accepting, and the New York students were not negatively impacted. Institutionally, Prospect College and Mardigras University also made it very convenient for their doctoral students to complete the program. Courses were offered, right at Prospect College, during the Fall and Spring Semesters, so Hector and the other Prospect faculty members enrolled in the program did not have to travel anywhere in order to attend class.

After the interview: bracketing my feelings about Hector.

After interviewing Lissette just the night before and getting some unexpected results, Hector’s interview had me thinking that my research was officially out of control. However, after reviewing the contents of Hector’s transcripts, reflecting for a few weeks, and recalling a rather lengthy conversation that took place between Hector and I off-tape, I began to realize that what Hector did not say was more profound than what he did say.
There were things that Hector said off tape that helped me to understand the contents of his transcripts better. On tape Hector admitted to being self and pleasure centered. Hector described himself on tape as an Id dominated personality who avoided things that were not pleasurable. Off tape Hector also described himself as a “child of the 60’s.” who was from an era that popularized the saying, “turn on, turn in, dropout.” My memory of this conversation helped me to realize how unconventional Hector really is. Hence, my expectation that he would react to his doctoral experiences as most people would was clearly erroneous.

Off tape, I also asked Hector to explain more about his internal locus of control. Hector did not really explain more than he had on tape, but he did talk about the work of Albert Ellis. In an effort to understand Hector better, I looked up the concept as part to the data triangulation phase of this study. I discovered that the internal-external locus of control dimension is based on a theory that was developed by Julian B. Rotter. The theory posits that a person who falls toward the internal end of the dimension, like Hector, believes he has control over his environment.

A person falling toward the external end believes that control of the environment is beyond his or her ability (1983, Houson, Bee, and Rimm). This seemed to explain why Hector seemed blasé about certain things that occurred during his doctoral experiences.

Hector said that he is a follower of Albert Ellis. Hector indicated that Ellis’ work taught him to control his reaction to events that happen within his environment and external to himself. Hector suggested that I look up Albert Ellis’ work, which I did. Briefly stated, the late clinical psychologist, Robert Ellis, is well known for REBT, or
Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. The theory behind REBT is that our reaction to having our goals blocked is determined by our beliefs, and when our goals are blocked we react in unhealthy ways (“REBT Network,” 2010). Ellis believed that individuals are not disturbed by events that occur, but by our belief about the events. Ellis indicated that individuals could live emotionally satisfying lives by disciplining their thinking because human feeling stems from thinking (Ellis, & Harper, 1975)

Learning about REBT helped me to understand Hector’s attitude and responses even better. I couldn’t help but wonder if asking Hector to describe the barriers and facilitators to his doctoral experiences caused Hector to be reticent in his responses. Perhaps the terms barriers and facilitators were too extreme. Would Hector’s responses been different had asked him to describe those things that either annoying or were helpful to him instead, or was my sense of disappointment in his responses causing me to suspect that he was less than forthcoming?

After careful reflection, I have resolved to accept Hector’s responses as genuine. I have also come to appreciate that Lissette and Hector’s unexpected responses to my questions have not diminished the results of my study, but have made them richer and more believable. Capturing the rich, complex memories of Lissette and Hector’s lived doctoral experiences, through the detail of their own words, will hopefully result in verisimilitude of my written account of their stories, enabling the reader to live vicariously through those descriptions.
Introducing Marisol.

“If you appeared to be more of the right kind of ethnic racial background, no doubt, you were being tracked into the academic… I mean I was being tracked into going into a secretarial program.”

Marisol is currently a Gotham faculty member who is an OPENGATE Program Counselor at Prospect College. Marisol was born in Puerto Rico and raised in New Jersey. She was approximately 40 years of age at the time that I interviewed her. Marisol attended her doctoral studies at Suburb University at Albany in New York, during the 1980’s, where she attained a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology. While attending her doctoral studies at Albany, Marisol was married and employed part-time, as an
OPENGATE Program Counselor at Prospect College. Marisol was a Fellowship recipient. She attended her course work at the Albany campus and conducted her internship at Boricua College in New York City.

**My Interview Experience with Marisol.**

After my brief interview with Hector, I walked down the institutional pale green hallway to Marisol’s office, a little earlier than scheduled. Marisol was in with a student when I knocked on the door and she asked me to wait outside for a moment. After the student left, Marisol invited me in to her tidy office; I could not help but notice that her bookshelf was packed with psychology books. I explained my reason for being there, the purpose of my research, and I explained that I needed to have her sign an Institutional Review Board (IRB) form, and I also offered her a copy of the recorded interview. Marisol asked me for copies of both. She carefully reviewed the IRB form, signed it, made a copy for herself, and gave me the original. Because none of the other co-researchers asked for a copy of their IRB form, Marisol impressed me as cautious.

**My Impressions of Marisol.**

After interviewing Marisol twice, she struck me as a sensitive, highly aware, giving person that I had a lot in common with. After both of my interviews with Marisol, we had the opportunity to have lunch together at the Prospect College cafeteria, because my next interview (with Miguel) was not scheduled until 5 p.m. This gave me a chance to tell Marisol about my academic endeavors, work life, and personal background. I showed Marisol pictures of the U.S.F. campus and she especially liked the picture of the U.S.F. Administration Building with its’ palm trees kissing the clear blue sky. Marisol also had a
chance to share some of her research interests with me. After lunch, I went to Marisol’s office to pick up my knapsack. Before I left, I asked Marisol for a copy of her dissertation, which she agreed to send me.

On June 27, 2010, I had an experience that I will never forget. After being angry for two weeks about something that happened at work, I received a surprise package in the mail. The following is from my reflective journal entry dated June 27, 2010:

After two weeks of wallowing in self-pity, I am starting to become more lucid. Something really touching happened to me today. Sometime last week, I received a copy of Marisol’s dissertation by mail. I avoided opening the package because I was in a depressive funk. I couldn’t touch this dissertation feeling that way, so I did not write all of last week. I started to write again yesterday. I dove right into writing chapter 4, starting with the vignettes. When I got to the draft of Marisol’s vignette, I did not have the range of dates when she attended her doctoral studies, so I thought, ‘Open up the brown envelop that I know is her dissertation and find out when she submitted it.’ I did. When I opened up the package, I noticed that the pages of the dissertation were worn. I thought, ‘Why did she, and how did she send me a library copy of her dissertation?’ Then it dawned on me that it was the original copy. She gave me her original copy if her dissertation! She wrote on the inside cover, ‘June 2010, to Doreen, Hope my doctoral work helps you in some way along your life journey as your dissertation project helped me. All the best, Marisol.’ I broke down and cried. I’m in tears as I write this. Is my work important to someone else? Did I already help someone? Can I have an impact?
Can I make a difference? Did I just really make a difference to someone else by doing this project? I’m touched. I’m amazed.

A Closer Look at Marisol.

Marisol stated that her parents were both born and raised in Coamo Puerto Rico, and they migrated to the United States mainland in the 1950’s in search of a better life for their kids. Marisol indicated that she was conceived in the United States, but born in Puerto Rico. However, Marisol’s mother migrated to New Jersey, when Marisol was six months old. Marisol attended her formative school years in New Jersey until her late high school years, when she decided to return Puerto Rico. Marisol said that she loved being in touch with her roots, so enrolled at Catholic University in Ponce, Puerto Rico where she completed her bachelor’s degree.

After completing her bachelor’s degree, Marisol attended Bowling Green State University where she started work on her Master’s degree. Marisol said that she went to Bowling Green because she was given a scholarship to attend there, but she only attended for a trimester because the environment was culturally too different. At the time, Marisol had friends who were attending graduate school at Suburb University at Albany, so she went to visit. Marisol said that she enjoyed the diverse environment much better so decided to apply there. Marisol indicated that she interviewed with a wonderful chair person in the Counseling Master’s program who facilitated the transfer of her credits from Bowling Green to Suburb University. Marisol was also able to get a scholarship to attend Suburb University, where she completed her Master’s in Psychology, Specialist in Education Certificate, and Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology without interruption.
When I asked Marisol what her Ph.D. experience was like for her, she described it as an extended period of time. She completed her course work right away, but did her internship in New York, at Boricua College instead of at Albany. Marisol said that she hired someone to provide supervision for her at Boricua College, so that she could then qualify for licensure. Doing an internship in New York City delayed Marisol’s doctoral process because she had to travel from New York City to Albany, and as she became closer to finishing her dissertation she had to travel back and forth weekly. During this time, Marisol also married and began working full-time, so as Marisol put it, “it was a balancing act.”

Components of Marisol’s Doctoral Experience.

Personal Factors as a component- external barrier lack of finances, external facilitator financial aid.

One barrier that Marisol experienced, but overcame, during all of her academic years was problems with finances. Marisol was raised in a humble household by her mother who was a single parent (Marisol’s father passed away) with barely 6 years of education. Marisol’s mother had a limited level of education because she had to work to support her family when she was young, so Marisol’s education was important to her. Given the circumstances, Marisol said that she knew that academics would be her “way out”. However, she was only able to get the education that she needed because she was able to compete academically for scholarships that paid for her education throughout the years. Marisol made it clear that she would not have been able to get a doctorate had it not been for the scholarships that she was awarded. Marisol stated:
I would say unlike students now who could think about going to college as you’re in elementary, high school, and getting the support much easily because financially it is much more available, that was not the case when I was going to school. So if you were not academically prepared and you could not compete you were not going to get much support. You did not really have that choice unless your family was willing to pay for that, so for me the finances have always been an issue and thank God I was able to work it out that I was able to get the economic support throughout all of my education, I guess ever since high school, and of course to make it possible for me to continue for the dissertation.

Specific to her doctoral experience, Marisol said that she experienced financial difficulties while doing her internship at Boricua College because she had to pay someone to supervise her. At the time, Marisol and her husband were both graduate students and were making little money. After her internship experience, Marisol’s financial situation worsened because she became disqualified for her scholarship while she was in the process of writing her dissertation. When she became ineligible for scholarship assistance, Marisol experienced a shift in values because she had to pay for her tuition out-of-pocket. Financially, she had to make some difficult choices. Marisol stated:

There came a time, during my doctoral dissertation process that I was no longer eligible for financial support because I was now making some money as oppose to just being a student and maybe working part-time. And, there was a point that I said to myself, well, if my education is important to me I’ve either got to pay this,
continue to pay my tuition and maintain my registration, because if not, what I’m going to do? Just drop out because I’m not getting the financial support anymore? You sort of get comfortable knowing that you can compete and get the financial support and then at some point you have to say this is important and you gotta show it’s important, and you gotta now pay out of pocket if that’s what it takes. And that’s what I did, and so I think that was a turning point for me because you sort of, as I said, I never came from a family that had much in terms of financial means, and so this was my ticket for the future was academics, and I really attempted to do very well, but there came a time too that we had to realize you would have to also pay for what you wanted as well, and it wasn’t always going to be by scholarships, and so for me that represented a change in values to some degree, so that was an experience.

Hence, Marisol traded her scholarship for full-time employment as a Prospect College faculty member, and although her values where tested, it was her doctoral degree that won out.

_Social role component- role barriers adult learner, worker, daughter, and spouse._

Marisol described her doctoral experience as a balancing act that required her to juggle her work, family, and school responsibilities at the same time. In order to help me understand what this experience meant to Marisol, I asked her to describe her typical day, while she was a doctoral student. Marisol recalled:

While I was doing graduate work, doctoral work, I would just say it was just like any other student that, where I would come in for the classes full-time and spend
long days on campus basically taking the classes and afterwards studying on campus as well. That was typical when I was doing course work. Once I started to do the dissertation it was a little unique because again, at that point I started to work here at Prospect full-time. I was here 9-5 but afterwards I was always staying later to work on preparing different aspects of my dissertation, and then traveling on my day off to Albany. So Monday through Thursday as an example I might have worked here full time, worked in the evenings to prepare whatever I needed to prepare for the dissertation, and then on Fridays I would travel to Albany. I would get up very early and spend, take bus rides basically, because it was easier to go into Albany at that time directly instead of taking the train and I did not have a car at that time. In New York, it is hard to have a car. So I would be there by, before noon and basically spend the time I had to spend in meetings and then travel back home at night. But at least I was able to work full-time. I was working on the dissertation in the evening. I was able to get the support from the department [at Prospect], to use the facilities for what I needed and I was able to do the research on campus as well for my dissertation, which also was a plus…

Marisol said that besides having to balance her work and school responsibilities, being married presented an additional factor. Marisol explained, “The good thing was that I was also married to someone who was a student, a graduate student, and that helped, but it had its challenges as well because you had to balance everything.” Marisol said that besides being married, she was limited in her ability to be responsive to her extended family because Marisol lived in New York and her extended family lived in
New Jersey. Marisol explained, “…Of course my extended family, also being in contact with them and trying to be responsive as a daughter also required some delicate balance as well because they lived in New Jersey, and I lived in New York, and even though I was married, there was always these ties that bind that meant you want to be responsive, but it becomes difficult to be responsive for every concern that is raised.”

**Cultural component- barriers.**

*Negative Event by Ethnicity.*

Marisol’s struggle with financial barriers and negative events based on her ethnicity began early in her academic life. Had Marisol not been able to overcome these barriers in her formative years, she would not have had access to the education that prepared her for an advanced level of education. Marisol emotionally expressed gratitude for a teacher that she had in eighth grade who recognized Marisol’s potential and refused to let her go to a high school that wasn’t going to prepare her academically. Marisol said that she almost chose to go to a vocational high school because her mother could not afford a better education for her. Marisol cried when she told me the story about the teacher who persisted in guiding her education, which resulted in Marisol getting awarded her first scholarship:

I have to really give credit to even way back because my parents were very humble people, background, my father died so it was very tough on my mother. She was a single parent and had it not been like even in the eighth grade, I went to Catholic school when I was growing up. Catholic school you did not have to pay for tuition at that time, just before they started to make that transition to paying
tuition. So, I was very lucky. I feel, that I had a teacher in eighth grade who refused to let me go to a high school that wasn’t going to prepare me academically. I was graduating in eighth grade with a medal for general excellence in school, but I was going to choose a high school that was vocationally oriented because financially my mother was not going to be able to afford it and her [the teacher’s] insistence that I go to an academic, go to a high school that would prepare me academically, made all the difference in my life today. I say that and I get emotional because had it not been for someone like her my life probably would have been very different and she would not give up. So I found somebody who would support my efforts. So I’m really, really, grateful to someone like her because it really changed the course of my life and ever since then, because I was a very good study I was always able to get the scholarships, so had it not been because I was able to compete and academically get that support, I don’t know that I would have gotten the doctorate.

With the help of a special teacher in junior high school, Marisol was able to attend a Catholic high school, that would prepare her academically. However, as a high school sophomore, Marisol was nearly placed in a vocational track, not because of her lack of academic achievement, but because of her ethnicity. Marisol stated:

I think one of the things that I can say as I’d been growing up, and not just related to the doctoral experience, but even in high school, I would say that the lack of support for people like myself at that time to pursue college was not as strong. I really felt that in order for me to go into the direction that I wanted, I had to take
the initiative. Had I not taken the initiative in high school I don’t think I would have gone to college because I had a guidance counselor, actually that probably had an impact on why I decided to go into counseling. I had a guidance counselor that really was not as supportive because I went to an all girls’ high school, Catholic High School, where there were in my graduation class think three Puerto Ricans.

Marisol said that at this high school, her goal to get an academic education and go to college was not supported. Instead, she was being academically tracking into going into a secretarial program. Marisol said that if you appeared to be the “right kind of race” you were placed into an academic track. If not, you were placed into a vocational one. According to Rodriguez (1991), for many years, tracking was a persistent part of the New York City School System with the lower tracks being represented by vocational schools. Academic tracking also took place at individual high schools. The upper tracks prepared students for college and the remainder of the tracks lead the attainment of commercial diplomas, which lead graduates to office and lower level employment. Rodriguez (1991) stated, “Hispanics have constituted an increasing proportion of the students in vocational schools over the last two decades” (p. 176).

Marisol said that she knew that if she wanted to be placed into an academic track, she would have to take the initiative. Marisol explained how she confronted this situation:

If you appeared to be more of the right kind of ethnic racial background, no doubt, you were being tracked into the academic. And one of the things that I had to do was requested a meeting with my guidance counselor, in this Catholic
school. It was a nun and I said, ‘Hey, I’m just as smart and I have good grades and all these other students are in the academic program, but I’m being told to take typing and all these other courses and I know that I can do the college level work.’ And if I had not gone there and not, and I said to myself, because this was a very important moment for me, and at that time I was reading these self-help books, I’m a big reader of self-help books, so I was reading, and I said ya know, I’m not going to leave that office until she puts me into an academic track, and I literally sat in her office until she agreed to change me, so for me that was another turning point in my life because here I know, this was during my sophomore year of high school. I could see that I was able to compete with all these other students that were getting, being tracked academically, academic curriculum, I was taking some of the courses with them, but I noticed that in some of these other courses they were getting all these world geography, world history, and I was being put into typing. I said there’s something wrong here. So I made that appointment, I talked to the guidance counselor and I said, ‘I want to go to college and I don’t want to continue to take this kind of curriculum.’ And there was resistance on her part, there was reluctance, but I was determined that I would not leave that office until I got changed in terms of my curriculum. And that too has made all of the difference in my life in terms of where I am today.

Marisol also experienced a lack of support in subtle ways while she was attending Suburb University as a doctoral student. Marisol indicated that there were so few minority students attending Suburb University at the time, that there were faculty
members that had negative perceptions of those minority students that they were not accustomed to teaching. There was faculty that alluded that they did not believe that the minority students would be successful.

I think I attended grad school at a time when there were not a lot of minorities, at least in Suburb University Albany in the doctoral program. We were very few, really small numbers, in Albany. And so sometimes it wasn’t as supportive of an environment that I would have liked. Subtleties sometimes lead me to believe that unless you can find people in the college environment you knew that sometimes some of the comments that professors may make and not specifically related in the counseling department, other graduate work, ‘cause you had to take courses outside of the department as well sometimes the view, the perception of minorities, working with people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds is not typical for many of these faculty members. And so, it was not the kind of environment that I felt that I would like to live in for a long period of time.

Marisol shared this particular instance with me:

I was most bothered by a class that I took in psychology by the comments of a professor in terms of sometimes there was reference to people who he thought were more primitive in their behaviors. I also have training in anthropology, and I would not, even if the behaviors were different, or the traditions were different, I would never use a term like that to refer to people. It really bothered me that he is speaking in the abstract about people from different cultures and referring to them at primitive. And I understand that in anthropology that is a term that has been
used, it is a term that can be used, but I guess in the context that I remember it, it bothered me.

Marisol also said that one of the few Puerto Rican students that was enrolled with her dropped out because he felt that the environment was not supportive enough. Marisol indicated that having that student drop out only reinforced the faculty attitudes that Puerto Ricans could not be successful at Suburb University. According to Marisol:

So things like that, sometimes the belief that students like us would not make it, because I was one of probably a handful of students or less who were enrolled in the doctoral program literally when I got started. And another, a fellow student who was Puerto Rican as well decided to drop out because he did not like what was going on there and he wanted a more supportive environment.

Marisol said that there had been another Puerto Rican student who had completed the program successfully, but when Marisol’s Puerto Rican colleague dropped out, questions were raised.

*No Latino Role Model.*

Marisol said that a barrier that she experienced was the lack of minority mentors or advisors that were available to offer academic support. Marisol explained why it is important to her to have mentors of your own ethnic background accessible. Marisol stated:

I would say the fact that there were not many minority faculty that I was working with that could often serve in a mentoring role was a concern. And in some ways it is important to have someone like yourself or at least like yourself in terms of
ethnic background or racial background, whatever, that at least they understand, that they are sensitive to the concerns and the experiences of those that are part of the minority population. I think that was always something that could have been a barrier and at times made it just a little bit more difficult because you did not have someone to express your concerns with or to sort of check out your impressions to see if this indeed was something that was typical or not typical of the student’s experience. So, I did not have that sounding board.

Marisol said that it would have been beneficial if she would have had a mentor of Puerto Rican ethnicity to affirm how she felt, based on their own experiences of being someone from a Puerto Rican background in a predominately white environment. Marisol said that it was disadvantageous to her that there was a lack of diversity among students, and even less so among faculty.

*Cultural component-facilitator.*

*Latino Community.*

One thing that was helpful to Marisol was that she had access to a small group of Latino students at Suburb University, who were primarily of Puerto Rican ethnicity, that were supportive and became like her extended family. Marisol said of these students:

There was a group of international students at Suburb University Albany that for me was very helpful. There was a little Latino…primarily Puerto Rican, community of students that was very supportive as well. So they became like your extended family there. And we visited each other either in the dorms or in the community, we had apartments there. And so when we couldn’t get away to go to
our families, they were your support, your family. So I have friends that I still keep in touch with from that community … people that I met and that are doing other things in Puerto Rico or here in the U.S. and I still keep in touch with them.

Marisol said that she enjoyed the company of this group of individuals because they would go out dancing, listen to music, or share meals together. She indicated that the group offered a social connection so that you did not feel that you were alone in the process at Albany. Marisol added these additional comments about the group:

It was the sense of camaraderie with that community that sort of gave you that strength when you needed it outside of the academic world and being able to know that there were people there that would cook for you at whatever time of the night that you would show up or just talk with you hours on end. It was fun having people that you could walk the streets of Albany and just enjoy the company of people that shared your background and culture and feel at ease. So that was a lot of fun.

In sum, Marisol indicated that this group of Latinos served as an anchor during her doctoral experience at Albany, which was very, very important to her.

*Service to Puerto Ricans.*

Marisol said that one thing that inspired her while she was working on her doctorate was the outreach work that she did with a Catholic Charities group for Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in the community. Marisol said that she would pick up one of the sisters and visit families in a mushroom farm in Ravina, New York. Marisol said that she would provide services to Puerto Rican workers recruited from the Island to work
there. Apparently, the women were suffering from nervous attacks because they felt isolated in their new environment. Marisol explained:

…they would come to our attention because they would show up in the emergency room, with the wife, but more than, one case, particularly one of them would show up in the emergency room with what was a, would be would call un ataque de nervios [a nervous attack], in our culture. Basically someone who is feeling isolated from her community. Who was alone among a mostly male population of workers on this mushroom farm, who lived in a trailer, with a new born baby, with no one to talk to, to express her joy of having this child, and how to get around. It was not like you could hop on a subway or a bus very easily. She was very isolated and we would go visit her and see how she was doing and how the child was doing because she was presenting…in a way that came to the attention as if she was a psychiatric case. But in fact as we talked there was nothing wrong with her. She was just experiencing an expressing herself in a way that would be typical of un ataque de nervios [nervous attack] in Puerto Rico.

Marisol’s work with the women at Ravina, helped inspire her work with Puerto Ricans. Her research in this area raised awareness of the need for more bi-lingual, bi-cultural professionals in different settings, especially when psychological services are needed. Marisol’s research was later used to encourage the hiring of more Latinos to deliver psychiatric and psychological services. Marisol said that she felt good that her research was of use to others.
**Social component-facilitator.**

**Faculty status and faculty support.**

Marisol mentioned several institutional related facilitators to her doctoral experience, which included the faculty support that she received from her advisor, her dissertation committee chairperson, and the assistance that she received from Prospect College. She repeatedly said that her dissertation committee chairperson was of great help to her. Marisol’s chairperson was a well-respected professor in the department of Black and Puerto Rican Studies at Albany. Marisol said that she found her chair affirming of who she was and what she was experiencing at Albany.

Marisol said that during her initial meeting with her dissertation chairperson, he agreed without hesitation to support her fully in the mist of everything else that was going on in her life. His unconditional support motivated Marisol and helped her move toward completing her degree. Marisol said that she would not have gotten too far without his assistance. Marisol added:

That was an important moment for me too, to know that I would have his support. Because he was very respected in the department and it matters, it matters who chairs the dissertation….The dissertation advisor understood…and really was there to support my efforts. I cannot say that he put up obstacles to my being able to complete the dissertations in any way. I really felt that I got the support. I guess I felt that he was, oh, had a greater level of awareness and appreciation for who I was and what I wanted to do in life. Based on maybe his own training and as a counselor where he felt that, you know, even if it wasn’t in his background
initially the exposure to students like myself had an impact such that he was committed to being able to support my efforts down the road.

Marisol’s advisor was also of great help because he was very flexible and did not require her to meet with him as frequently. Marisol also said that it was helpful that her advisor was married to a Puerto Rican woman and had conducted research about Puerto Ricans. Marisol stated:

And at that time there were not many minority faculty at Albany. The person who served as my advisor happened to be married to a Puerto Rican woman. So he had published on the topic of Puerto Rican women and that interested me…He had also published on counseling Puerto Ricans because of his affiliation and his work with the community back in Albany back at that time. So, he was the closest to someone with familiarity with Puerto Ricans the department had.

Although working at Prospect meant that Marisol would have to juggle working and going to school, there were benefits. For instance, Marisol found it financially helpful to be working full-time at Prospect. In addition, she was given a flexible work schedule, which helped accommodate her commute back and forth to Albany. Lastly, Marisol was allowed to do research on campus and use the Prospect computer facilities for her dissertation.

**Marisol’s survival tactics.**

Marisol survived her doctoral experience by finding individuals like her dissertation chair and advisor who would provide her with the academic support that she needed. She was also able to find the camaraderie of other Latino students that she could
have fun and socialize with. Lastly, Marisol also did things to inspire her doctoral work, like helping to provide psychological services to other Puerto Ricans.

**Marisol’s Advice to others.**

I asked Marisol about how she thought the representation of Latinos in higher education can be increased, and she indicated that that she has been concerned with this very issue because of her work with OPENGATE students at Prospect College. Marisol said:

I work with groups of students that don’t get in through the front door at Prospect. They come in just before the cut-off. This is a special admissions program. And so, I work with students from beginning to end. They come in and I work with them counseling, teaching, and beyond that once they graduate. But if I could help make a difference, in terms of getting involved in pipeline programs, I would like to do that more.

Marisol said that faculty members need to get involved with students so that the students will know what to expect when they get to college. Marisol said that it often takes OPENGATE students longer to connect to Prospect because they do not know what to expect when they get there. They sometimes fail technically, and go on academic probation before they realize that they need connect to Prospect in order to achieve their goals. When I asked Marisol how early such a pipeline program should start, she said in high school or before. Marisol suggested that students can start connecting by visiting colleges or taking college courses while still in high school.
Summary: Marisol

In sum, Marisol experienced numerous barriers and facilitators during her doctoral experience. The most profound barrier that she experienced was related to her lack of finances, however, Marisol was able to overcome this obstacle throughout most of her academic life. Because of Marisol’s academic giftedness, she was able to compete for scholarships from high school on. However, she became ineligible for her doctoral scholarship while she was writing her dissertation because she started working full-time at Prospect College. Working at Prospect was both a blessing and a curse for Marisol. On one hand, she was earning a full-time salary and Prospect granted her a flexible work schedule and access to computers and research facilities. However, she struggled to balance work with her school and family responsibilities. For Marisol, being married was both a facilitator and barrier. On one hand it was helpful that Marisol was married to another graduate student, but on the other hand, being married also created another responsibility that she had to juggle along with her school work and job. Marisol also needed to find time to be attentive to her family, who lived in New Jersey while she lived in New York.

Marisol experienced several barriers that were related to her ethnicity. For instance, although Marisol had a very special eighth grade teacher who ensured that she attended a Catholic high school that would prepare her academically rather than vocationally, when Marisol was a high school sophomore she realized that she was being tracked into secretarial studies never the less. Marisol indicated that she noticed that the minority students at her high school were being placed in vocational tracks and white
students towards academic tracks in disproportionate numbers. Marisol said that she was switched to an academic track after she insisted on the change.

Negative experiences with faculty did not end at high school for Marisol. She also had negative experiences with some of the faculty while she was a graduate student at Albany. Since there were so few Latino students, Marisol sensed the low expectations of faculty members in the form of subtle innuendos. She also said that there was a lack of Latino faculty role models who could relate to what Marisol was experiencing because she was attending a doctoral program in a predominately white institution.

Marisol experienced some culturally related facilitators. Marisol was able to connect to a small group of Latino students at Albany who were predominately Puerto Rican. Being able to socialize with this group helped Marisol to feel less isolated during her doctoral work and it also provided her with an enjoyable outlet. Marisol also experienced a number of social facilitators related to both the academic institution that she attained her doctorate from and from the academic institution that she worked for.

Marisol was able to find a supportive academic advisor and dissertation committee chair, while attending Suburb University at Albany. During both of my interviews with Marisol, she repeatedly said that her dissertation chair was indispensible to her doctoral success. Finally, because Marisol was a Prospect College faculty member, she had the benefit of being able access the institutions word processors and library.

**After the Interviews: Bracketing my feelings about Marisol.**

After transcribing, analyzing and reviewing Marisol’s transcripts several times, I could not help but react with anger. Marisol’s near mishap with being vocationally
tracked struck me emotionally because when I arrived in New York in February, I remembered driving through Harlem and noticing a concentration of vocational and technical schools there. After interviewing Marisol, the placement of these types of schools in Harlem impressed me as less than coincidental. Would my sense of anger over Marisol’s experience and the notion of educational tracking skew my analysis of Marisol’s data in some way? The answer is no, because being aware of my feelings enabled me to separate Marisol’s experience from my reaction to her experience. However, I still felt a sense disbelief about the notion of educational tracking on a personal level, and I wondered about the fate of those Puerto Ricans who were less fortunate than Marisol and were misguided educationally to their own detriment.

Figure 6. Components of Marisol’s Doctoral Experience
Introducing Miguel.

“I did not know how to do the research to go to a graduate program. I just thought, Ivy University, great reputation, go there... I wish I would have made an informed decision and I didn’t.”

Miguel is currently a GOTHAM faculty member who works for Boricua Center at Prospect College. He was born in Spain and raised in Puerto Rico. During the time that I interviewed him, he was in his 40’s. Miguel attended his doctoral studies at Ivy University in New York City in the 1990’s, where he attained a Ph.D. in Political Science. While working on his doctorate, Miguel was employed part-time as a graduate assistant, and he began working full-time, while writing his dissertation. Miguel was a Dorothy Danforth Compton Fellowship recipient, and he attended all of his course work on campus.

My interview experience with Miguel.

I interviewed Miguel on two occasions at Prospect College. The first interview took place at his cozy office that was stacked high with papers and books. I think that Miguel was surprised when he asked me if I wanted to go elsewhere to conduct the interview and I said no, that I was accustomed to interviewing anywhere. However, for my second interview with Miguel, he reserved a small conference room with an unbalanced tabled a few doors down.

I interviewed Marisol prior to both of my interviews with Miguel, which were both not until 5 p.m. During my first visit, I decided to use the time in between interviews to walk around Prospect and observe the facility and movement of the students. I took
several photographs and decided to spend some time sitting on the ledge of the corridor located on the second floor that connected two of the buildings. I marveled as the steady flow of city traffic drove underneath the corridor.

For my second visit, I decided to use my time more efficiently. On March 23, 2010, I decided to pack both my computer and foot pedal because I knew that I would be at Prospect all day long, so I did not mind carrying around a little extra weight. I wanted to get a jump on downloading and transcribing the recordings of the interviews that I had up to that point. I decided that I would go to the Boricua Center library, located within Prospect College’s main library. During my first visit to Prospect College, I went to the Center’s library briefly. I gained access by showing my U.S.F. student identification, Florida driver’s license and by telling the library security guard where I intended to go.

During my second visit, I was initially denied access to the Center’s library by the security guard that was on duty at the time. However, I insisted on gaining access because I knew that the library was created in order to encourage the research of topics related to Puerto Ricans. The Boricua Center library was established in 1973 to create awareness of Puerto Rican history because it was not taught in U.S. history books. At the time, few if any research and archival centers were collecting archival materials on the history of the Puerto Rican community. Today, the Center houses the largest repository of materials on Puerto Ricans in the United States and it as an important research center not just for Puerto Rican students and scholars but for others interested in comparative work.
After being denied access to the Center’s library, I called el Boricua Center’s administrative office. I identified myself as a doctoral student from the state of Florida conducting a study about Puerto Rican faculty at Prospect College. I asked the individual who answered the telephone if the Center’s library was opened to the public, and she said it was. I told her that I was standing in front of the main library and had been denied access by the security guard, and she said that she would meet me there to assist.

As I waited for the Boricua staff member to address my situation, I took the time to observe the flow of students entering the main library and I paid special attention to the way that the security guard interacted with the Prospect students. The first thing that I noticed was that the guard denied numerous Prospect students access because they did not have their identification cards. In order to gain access to Prospect College you must swipe your school identification card at the turnstiles. You must do the same to gain access to the library, after you have already entered the building. This made me wonder how some of the students managed gain access to the college to begin with. The second thing that I noticed is that the guard was doing a good job of keeping the orderliness of the queue of students entering the library. He was especially careful to separate those students entering the library with their identification from guests entering the library by using the gate just to the right of the turnstiles.

I was getting the vilest impression of the inaccessibility of Prospect College, when the Centro staff member showed up and asked the guard why he denied me access. The security guard told her that he did not realize that I wanted to go to the Center’s library. In order to avoid complicating the situation, I said nothing and let the Boricua
staff member handle it. Moments later, she escorted me to the Center’s library; she apologized for what happened and left. This incident made me appreciate U.S.F.’s free flowing access compared to the schools within the GOTHAM system, which after all of my visits impressed me as a closed, less inviting educational system.

**My impression of Miguel.**

After speaking with Miguel on the telephone a few times and interviewing him twice, I found him to be brilliant but humble despite his upbringing and life experiences. Miguel’s father is a doctor, and he is also the holder of a Ph.D. from Ivy University, an Ivy League college. Miguel could no doubt afford to be arrogant, but he was not. This may be because Miguel’s life was not what most people would expect.

It can be inferred that Miguel’s father is a brilliant man because he is a doctor, however Miguel told me that his father was always more interested in practicing medicine as an art more than as business. I took this to mean that Miguel’s father is a person with a humble, giving heart, who cares more about his patients then money. This led me to believe that Miguel’s upbringing was probably more comfortable than extravagant. I also concluded that this is why finances served to influence Miguel’s doctoral experience. In fact, one of the reasons that Miguel chose to go Ivy University is because he was awarded a scholarship to attend there. Although the prospect of attending Ivy University was appealing at first, Miguel’s experiences there were as unexpected as Miguel’s attitude when you meet him. In sum, my impression of Miguel is that he is a brilliant man who survived the rigors of Ivy University, yet was humble enough to have
lived comfortably in a low income area that he referred to as the “other Harlem”, while working on his doctorate.

**A closer look at Miguel.**

Miguel said that he was born in Spain where is parents met. His father left Puerto Rico to study medicine in Spain and that is when he met Miguel’s mother. Miguel lived in Spain for 40 days and then his parents moved him to Puerto Rico where he was raised. Miguel went to private schools in Puerto Rico. He attended Catholic school for 8 years and then went to Spain for one year. Miguel then returned to Puerto Rico for 2 years and went to the United States where he went to a parochial school to finish high school. He attended Rutgers’s University in Newark and completed his bachelor’s degree with a double major in science and economics. Miguel said that not unlike current times, the economy was so bad that there were no jobs for someone with the type of college degree that he had, so Miguel applied to New York University and was accepted to a program abroad called Hispanic Civilization. Miguel attained his Master’s degree and then worked for a year for the Census Bureau as an anumerator, and then as an assistant manager in the district office during the 1990 census. After that, Miguel applied to the political science doctoral program at Ivy University, where he graduated with his doctorate in 1999. Miguel said that worked for the New York City government, while writing his dissertation, and after a few years he applied for an academic job at Prospect College where he currently works. When I asked Miguel what his doctoral experience was like from beginning to end he said, “Trial by fire!”
Components of Miguel’s doctoral experience.

Personal Factors as a component - internal/external barrier self-efficacy and lack of finances, external facilitator financial aid.

Miguel described his doctoral experience as one of the most demanding experiences that he has ever had. He said that his graduate experience at New York University was qualitatively different than his experience at Ivy University. Miguel said that he did not think that he would survive the first semester because he was so nervous and overwhelmed. He did not feel comfortable until he received his first semester grades and saw that he was getting A’s. But even then, Miguel never felt fully secure.

Part of Miguel’s insecurity stemmed from the notion of affirmative action. Miguel said that this hindered him personally because affirmative action made him question whether he had what it took to be at a place like Ivy University. Miguel asked himself, “Am I here because I am a token? Are they giving me a pass?” Miguel said that nobody ever alluded or suggested that he was given preference, but Miguel still felt unsure of himself. When I asked Miguel for the basis of his impressions he said:

You know, politics. I mean, I was studying politics, so you know affirmative action is a very hot political issue and I guess I assimilated it. Interestingly enough, when I attended undergraduate school, when I filled out the form, I did not write down my ethnicity or race.

When I asked Miguel why? He said:

Because I wanted to prove that I could do it by my own merits. I wanted to prove that yes, a Puerto Rican could make it on his or her own….But by the time I went
to graduate school I said, ‘you know what, get over yourself, you are Puerto Rican. You do have a chance to get an education, so you know, that is who you are, just mark it [mark himself as Latino on his application for admission].’

Miguel admitted that it was to his advantage to identify himself as Puerto Rican on his application for admission to Ivy University because he was also applying for the Dorothy Danforth Compton Fellowship, which was designed to help minorities attend graduate school. Miguel said that doing so was not without consequence. Miguel explicated:

The one [scholarship] based at Ivy University was specifically to allow Puerto Rican students to attend university with that stipend and the fellowship. So, it was to my benefit that I indicate that [he was Puerto Rican], but precisely for those reasons I still had this lingering preoccupation, am I here because I am Miguel, or because I am Miguel the Puerto Rican? And is there a double standard? Is there a different standard by which they are judging me? I always felt that.

I asked Miguel to explain further what affirmative action mean to him while he was working on his doctorate and what the implications were. Miguel spoke very honestly and said that he wasn’t sure how reflecting on the experience 20 years later would influence his view, but he explained that he felt conflicted and guilty about taking advantage of affirmative action, but then he realized that not all Puerto Ricans were in the position to take advantage of such an opportunity. Miguel stated:

It is hard now because you are asking about something that happened 20 years ago, so I don’t know if what I am saying is influenced by how I view affirmative
action now, as oppose to then. Again, I was also conflicted. I was also conflicted about getting preference because I was Puerto Rican but also understanding the reasons why those preferences may have existed...To some extent, I felt that all the Puerto Rican students should have benefited...If I had just applied on my own without labeling myself, Latino, Puerto Rican or what have you, I could have made it, and let somebody else take advantage of that. Later I found that I was in the best position to take advantage of that preference precisely because of my educational advantage at that point. Many students were Puerto Rican, but did not have the credentials to take advantage of those opportunities that something like affirmative action would afford somebody, because of the structural problems involved, and Puerto Rican students, and I don’t have to tell you this, are at a disadvantage educationally. I was not. So I was in a better position to take advantage of that, but there is always a stigma. There is always a stigma associated with affirmative action. Again, no one has ever brought that up. It is something that I internalized, and it was an internal monologue of mine.

In sum, Miguel indicated that his experiences with affirmative action caused him to question his self-efficacy and served as a demotivating factor while he was working on his doctorate. Miguel constantly battled with himself, questioning whether he had what it took intellectually to remain at Ivy University and succeed in leaving the institution with a degree.

Miguel said that another barrier he experienced was when his fellowship ran out while he was writing his dissertation in Puerto Rico. When this happened, Miguel took a
teaching job to help support himself, but he had to stop working on his dissertation when he realized that it was impossible to do both at the same time. Miguel recounted:

There was a moment, however, that I did question whether I would finish my dissertation, in fact my field research. I had gone to do field work. I lived in New York and I went to Puerto Rico. I felt that it would take me 9 to 10 months to collect these samples, to collect this survey. But once I was in Puerto Rico, the scholarship that I had benefited from stopped funding graduate students and started to fund kindergarten students, so I found myself without funding to continue my research, and as much as I scrambled I still needed money. So, I actually had to teach for one year in Puerto Rico. Thinking that I could teach, I continued to do research, although that became an impossibility because I was teaching 5 classes a semester so I was not going to be able to do it.

Miguel said that had it not been for the fellowship that he was awarded, he would not have been able to get a doctorate. Hence, for Miguel, losing funding was a tangible barrier.

*Social role component- role barriers adult learner, worker, son, and significant other.*

Miguel indicated that one barrier to his doctoral process emanated from the unraveling of a romantic relationship that he was involved with. Miguel indicated that he became romantically involved with a fellow student while he was working on his doctorate in New York. They dated for three years. The first year and a half was terrific, but the relationship began to sour by the second year. Miguel then went to Puerto Rico to
collect the data for his dissertation. When he realized that he would have to stay longer than expected, the relationship was jeopardized; Miguel was forced to choose between his girlfriend and his doctoral work. Rather than to end up with neither the girl nor the degree, he chose the degree and ended the relationship. Miguel explained the logic behind his choice:

When I had left for Puerto Rico, I had been in a romantic relationship for two years. And that relationship unraveled precisely because I had to stay there longer…What do you want to do? Do you want to salvage your relationship or do you want to finish your Ph.D.? And, it was very tough and ultimately I decided to stay because, I’m not going to get into the details, I figured to myself, I’m likely, me quedo sin la soga, y sin la cabra. I would have neither one nor the other one so I might as well finish here (Miguel stayed in Puerto Rico).

Miguel said that he returned to the United States in 1997 and was depressed for three or four months as a result of the break-up of romantic relationship previously discussed. With data in hand, Miguel did not start working on writing his dissertation results until 1998. Since Miguel had no funding, he had to get a job, so he became a full-time research assistance. In 1999, Miguel found another full-time job, but kept his job as a research assistance on a part-time basis. He said that he was able to finish writing his dissertation in three months despite having two jobs. Miguel said that he manage to finish because he would get up early in the morning and write for two hours and then he would get ready to go to work.
When I asked Miguel if having to work slowed down the process for him, he said that it was a combination of work and the breakup of his relationship. Miguel stated:

Many people were working as adjuncts. So, it was not unusual…more than having to work, it was the aftermath of the breakup that hurt me significantly.

Miguel also said that as much education as his parents and family had, they were unfamiliar with how things worked in the United States. Miguel said that he was at a disadvantage because he had to fill out financial aid forms for both his sisters and him. His parents were also unfamiliar with how to write a proper resume, which may be one of the reasons why (besides a bad economy) Miguel had trouble finding a job after he graduated with his bachelor’s degree. Miguel shared the following account:

When it came time to write a resume, I more or less followed my father’s example, but that’s not the way that resumes are written anymore. And I remember that when I graduated from college and this is very embarrassing to say, but like I said, I had a 3.8 average. I had graduated Phi Beta Kappa, a double major and when I applied for a job, I couldn’t get an interview. And I wondered, what is this? Why am I not getting even an interview, something, to all the jobs that I had applied to in Newark, Verizon, Prudential, these corporations? And then I thought I knew the reason why, because even though I had found the formatting that you had to write your resume, I did not know that you had to use bond paper. I did not know that you had to have it printed professionally, back in the 80’s, again. I printed my damn resume using a dot matrix on onion skin paper. Of
course anyone who would get that would make a plane out of it and throw it in the garbage can. Nobody told me how to do this.

Besides the fact that his parents were unfamiliar with what it took to navigate certain processes in the United States, Miguel said that his parents became infirm. They had various medical conditions while Miguel was working on his doctorate, which was difficult for Miguel.

*Social role component- role facilitators son, friend, and sibling.*

One thing that facilitated Miguel’s path toward pursuing a doctorate was his parents’ high expectations of him throughout his life. Miguel stated that his family made it clear that not only was he going to go college, he was going to go to some kind of post-graduate school. Because Miguel’s father is a doctor, and several of his relatives on his mother’s side of the family are lawyers and judges, there was no doubt that Miguel would either go to law school or graduate school. This was made clear to him as early as middle school. Miguel said:

So that is to say that expectation that you had to have a least have a college degree and if you did not finish it, it was an issue. I have on my father’s side, we are 20 grandchildren. I have sixteen cousins and I would say that about a third of them have college degrees. The others don’t, but that may be because their parents did not have college degrees themselves or maybe close to half… They assumed I would be an attorney. On my mom’s side I do have judges and attorneys out the wazu, so I guess it was not farfetched that I would be an attorney…I was always interested in politics. I was always argumentative. People thought that I would go
to law school that I would become an attorney. You become an attorney by going to law school. You go to law school after you finish four years of college. So I guess that is where it came from and given that my father was a physician people would ask me, ah you gonna be a doctor just like your father, and you know I guess I could have but I had no desire to be in the business of medicine, which is something that my father did not like either.

Miguel said that not only did his family expect him to attain an advanced level of education, it was a given that Miguel maintain the family’s level of social class. Miguel said, “We were a middleclass family, and we were going to maintain that.” Miguel furthered that this was not an expectation, but a constant. Miguel explained:

Even though I was Puerto Rican I was not an under privileged Puerto Rican. We were middle class. My father was a physician. He did not have a private practice where he was making hundreds of thousands of dollars. On the contrary, he worked in Newark New Jersey and Paterson New Jersey where 80% to 90% of his patients were Medicaid or Medicare recipients that did not pay a lot. So you know, we were pretty much in the middle class but certainly not under privileged. Hence, Miguel’s parent’s high academic and social class expectations of him no doubt served to provide him with a focused trajectory toward working to meet those goals.

Not only were Miguel’s parent infirm, Miguel had another friend that became ill, but overall, Miguel’s friends and family, especially his sister, were a great source of
support and encouragement. Miguel said that they kept saying, “You gotta finish it! You gotta finish it!”

*Cultural component - barrier*

*No Latino role model.*

A barrier that Miguel encountered during his doctoral process was the fact that he was one of only a handful of Latinos and the only Puerto Rican in his program. Miguel said that he was the first Puerto Rican to graduate from his program at Ivy University in twenty years. Miguel elucidated:

But at the same time I could not help but look around at my classmates even though there were a lot of students in my class, the first year 70 students, roughly 65 to 70 students followed by another 70 or 65, preceded by a class of 60 to 70 as well, there were only a handful of Latinos no other Puerto Rican, in fact I was the first Puerto Rican to graduate out of that program in twenty years. And I know who the other Puerto Rican is. He is right now a dean at the state university of New York. In fact there were very few other minority students. In fact my peers were African Americans from both political science and sociology. There were no other Latinos the year that I was there.

Miguel said that the programs dearth of Latino students was noticeable and served as a challenge for him, especially since he was already struggling with his sense of confusion about affirmative action. However, Miguel said that he did find solace in the fact that there were African American students there and they became a support network for him.
Negative event by ethnicity.

Miguel said that he noticed an ethnically discriminatory practice at Ivy University. He indicated that Ivy University used students from Latin America to pad their affirmative action roles, when affirmative action was designed to make up for past discrimination of the Latino population in the United States, not abroad. Risibly, the Latin American students would earn their degrees from the prestigious American university, and then return to their country.

Cultural component-facilitator.

Latino community.

Miguel said that although there was a dearth of Latino students at Ivy University, the fact that he lived in a predominately Puerto Rican neighborhood served as a refuge for him. Miguel stated:

I guess that to go back to the previous question about the dearth of Latino students and the lack of other Puerto Rican students the fact that I lived in New York City perhaps specifically, in an area that had traditionally been Latino specifically Puerto Rican although with growing numbers of Dominicans, made a difference I will say. The neighborhood that I lived in was Puerto Rican was certainly Latino and it was the Westside mirror or side of East Harlem, even though it was on the Westside, so I think, when I walked those ten blocks from Ivy University, I entered a completely different neighborhood. It was the ghetto, not a neighborhood that you would see college students, at the very beginning of me going to Ivy University. By the time I left, there was more students gentrifying the
neighborhood. So I think that environment, the fact that I was in New York City, the fact that I was in a Latino neighborhood to some extend allowed me to break from the Ivy League institution that I was in.

Miguel said that the neighborhood was fitting culturally, but not necessarily class wise. Miguel described the neighborhood as a low income, drug infested, high crime area, but the neighborhood was still a relief for him because he was able to communicate with others in Spanish and he could go around the corner and get Puerto Rican food. Miguel explained further during his second interview:

I did mention last time that even though I went to school in Morningside Heights at Ivy University, an Ivy League school in New York, I lived in a world removed from Ivy University. I lived 10 blocks away, meaning ½ a mile, away from the center of Ivy University but in a different, in a completely different social environment, and the neighborhood that I lived in was overwhelmingly Latino, overwhelmingly working class, lower class, at that time, and I moved to the city, in 1990. If you go back over the crime statistics, 1990 was the peak of murders in New York City. The crack trade around my neighborhood was unbelievable. I remember that taking the stairs on 106th street and Central Park to go up to the great hill in Central Park, it was impossible for you to step on a step without stepping on crack pipes. It was impossible, there was so many. But the fact that I lived in a Hispanic neighborhood was a relief for me. Again, it was a different class background, but it was comforting to be able to communicate with people in Spanish, to be able to go to the bodega and get a malta [a Puerto Rican malt
drink], and to go around the corner and get some rice and beans, you know that was very comforting. I would not go and drink coffee in any place but a cafeteria where I could get café con leche, you know things of that nature. So in that sense that was very comforting and sustaining.

**Social component- barrier.**

*Institution overpopulated.*

One of the biggest barriers that Miguel faced while pursuing his doctorate was related to Ivy University as an institution. Besides the dearth of Latino students there, the classes were extremely large, which created a competitive situation between the students, in order to gain the attention of their professor’s time; hence, the environment was less than supportive for the neophyte students. Instead of paying attention to the incoming students, the professors focused on the more senior ones. Miguel detailed the “swim or sink” experience:

We faced a lot of obstacles because we had to compete for the professor’s time and when you are a professor and you have an incoming class of 70 students and then taking care of a second class of about 30 students and then you do not pay attention to the incoming students. You focus on the ones that are at the second, particularly the ones who have the comprehensive examinations those are the people that you focus on. So we felt that you know, we were in a very big pool. In the deep end of the pool and we were thrown in and we had to swim or sink.

Miguel also spoke about Ivy University’s high attrition rate. He said that among the class of 70 students that he started with, only fifteen graduated. Miguel explicated:
I was in a class that had about 70 students and my class came after a class of about another 65 students and we preceded a third class of again 65 to 70 students. Of course Ivy University only graduates anywhere between 15 and 20 Ph.D.’s’ in political science every year. So you know that from the very beginning that it’s going to be a very high attrition rate. And indeed by the end of the first semester, the first year, the returning students from the second year, my class had been whittled down to half. And I think that again, any were between 15 and twenty students graduated from my class the year that I entered, the people that I entered with. So there was a lot of competition.

Miguel said that the students in his department had to also to compete for the professors’ attention with the students of international public affairs. So that was difficult. Miguel also said that there were also limited resources at the library. He stated, “Of course when you have to deal with so many students at the library, getting the books, or getting the articles from the reserves, you found that the resources were limited.”

In sum, Miguel said that he would have benefited from joining a department with a smaller student body.

*Social component- facilitator.*

*Faculty support.*

Miguel said that one thing that was lacking during his doctoral process was mentorship. He indicated that he did not have a mentor until he reached his dissertation writing stage, and finally having that mentor was salient to his experience. Miguel credits
his mentor for seeing him through the process, and he credits him for the person he is right now.

*Peer networks.*

Miguel said that although he had to compete with his peers for his professor’s attention, there was still a lot of camaraderie between them. He indicated that he had a congenial relationship with a network of peers who provided support and served as a safety net. Miguel recalled how this group of fellow students served as surrogate family during the holidays one year. Miguel said:

I remember the first year that I was in grad school, people who did not go home for Thanksgiving, you know, we got together. Let’s do a potluck. And, we did it in my apartment. So I had people over and that was very nice.

Miguel’s network of peers also helped each other while taking their qualify exams. Miguel said:

As you were studying for your comprehensive or qualifying exams, we organized study groups, to help each other out. So that was good as well.

Miguel said that if he did not feel motivated, or if he was frustrated, depressed and thinking about quitting the program, he would talk his friends and they would encourage him to continue on.

*Miguel’s survival tactics.*

Some tactics that Miguel employed while he was pursuing his doctorate included being academically persistent in the face of doubt. Miguel also had the discernment and the intestinal fortitude to break off a bad relationship that jeopardized his studies. When
the faculty at Ivy University were unavailable to assist Miguel, he looked toward his peers, friends and family who provided a network of support and kept him motivated.

**Miguel’ advice to others.**

Miguel offered some advice to other Latinos who are thinking about or who are currently pursuing a doctorate. First, Miguel said that if his life was “happening to somebody else,” he would strongly advise that person against having a long distance romantic relationship while pursuing a doctorate. Secondly, Miguel also said that you really need to know why you want your Ph.D. If you want to teach, if you want to stay in academia you need it. If you don’t want to stay in academia, you don’t need it.

Thirdly, you need to research and find the right Ph.D. program that will serve your needs and that will be a good institutional fit. Miguel said that he wished he had made a more informed decision. In fact, previous research indicates that incompatibility between the student and the chosen institution can cause college students to depart. According to Noel (1985), “retention begins with recruitment, with a good match between what the institution has to offer and what the student needs” (p. 14). Tinto (1997) concurs with Noel and indicated that institutional incongruence can have an impact on student college departure. Tinto describes incongruence in this context as a mismatch or lack of fit between the needs, interest, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution. Conversely, Bean (2005) has written that institutional fit is one theme that denotes why college students persist. Miguel explained:

I wish that I had done research to find the right Ph.D. program for me because I thought that Ivy University, great! When I got to Ivy University, Ivy University
was resting on its laurels from being an Ivy League institution. It was not the Ivy University of the 1940’s and 1950’s that was at the forefront of political science. I came into Ivy University in a trough. If I had done my research, I guess I would have ended up in a place like Wisconsin or North Carolina that may have been more fruitful and perhaps more coddling as a student. But you know, I did not do the research. I did not know how to do the research to go to a graduate program. I just thought, Ivy University, great reputation, go there. They are paying for your studies, definitely go there. Maybe I would have ended up going to Ivy University anyhow, but I wish I would have made an informed decision and I didn’t.

I asked Miguel how we can increase the representation of Puerto Rican doctorates and he said the issue is a pipeline problem. He said that we need to change the grade schools and more importantly middle schools. Miguel said:

I think we lose our children in middle school. I think by the time they enter high school, those who have taken their own path will just go off on their own path and the ones that want to continue will try their best to finish at least high school, but I think that the resources should be placed in middle school. It is a pipeline problem. Grade school feeds into middle schools, feeds into high school, high schools feed the universities.

Miguel also said that we need to provide resources at the university level: orientation needs to be provided and students need to be matched with mentors who will tell the students what to do in order to be successful. When I asked Miguel how we are losing our Latino students so young, Miguel replied that we are losing our Latino youth
by not identifying deficiencies in their educational foundations, and just as importantly, by not challenging them. Miguel suggested that rote learning methods be dispensed with and that students be taught by getting involved with projects and by hands-on-experience. Miguel also offered that the school year needs to be lengthened so there will be more time to develop the students’ academic potential. Instead of having three months off in the summer time, there could be shorter and more frequent breaks throughout the year. Finally, Miguel said that our teachers need to be better prepared and it would be great to have Latino teachers teaching Latino students.

**Summary: Miguel.**

In sum, Miguel experienced barriers that were related to the self. Because Miguel was a benefactor of affirmative action, Miguel doubted his abilities and often questioned if he had the ability to get into Ivy University on his own. Miguel also experienced financial hardship when his fellowship ran out as he was the conducting field work for his dissertation. This caused Miguel to have to get a teaching job. After accepting the job, Miguel realized that he could not teach five classes and collect his data at the same time, which caused the progress of his dissertation to come to a halt. The progress of Miguel’s dissertation was also delayed because he became depressed over the breakup of a long distance relationship that he was involved with.

In terms of other social role related issues, Miguel’s parents presented both facilitators and barriers to Miguel’s doctoral experience. On one hand, Miguel’s father was a physician, so Miguel’s family anticipated that he would attend graduate or law school in order to maintain the family’s middle class social status. On the other hand,
Miguel’s parents were educated in Puerto Rico and in Spain. Hence, they were unable to teach Miguel how to navigate the academic process in the United States.

Culturally, Miguel experienced some barriers at Ivy University. Miguel was one of two Puerto Ricans that had ever graduated from his program, and he was aware of the dearth of Latino students there. Miguel also became aware that Ivy University had an institutional practice of fulfilling their affirmative action requirements with Latin American students.

Miguel was able to find solace from his experiences at Ivy University by seeking refuge within the Puerto Rican neighborhood where he lived. While there, he was able to find others to speak Spanish with and he was able to find the Puerto Rican delicacies that he was accustomed to.

On a social level, Miguel experienced institutional barriers at Ivy University because of student overpopulation. This meant that faculty was not available to incoming students and Miguel only received mentorship when he was in the writing phase of his dissertation. On that note, Miguel said that having a mentor was extremely salient to his doctoral experience. Miguel indicated that his mentor got him through the dissertation process and is partly responsible for who Miguel is today.

**After the interviews: bracketing my feelings about Miguel.**

After interviewing Miguel, I realized how fortunate I was to have faculty members for research participants. For one thing, the individuals that I interviewed for this study were more like co-researchers than participants, and my interview with Miguel did not disappoint. From the moment that I contacted Miguel, he was very supportive of
this study. When I interviewed him, he was also good about testing my thinking and offering suggestions for future research. One thing that Miguel pointed out on tape as a limitation of this study is that his memory of his doctoral experiences may be different now than when he had those experiences 20 years ago. This was an excellent point that applies to all of my participants and I have mentioned this fact in the limitations section of this study. I think that researching other researchers has pushed me to interrogate my own thinking in an effort to present the research data in a lucid and accurate manner.

So what do I feel about Miguel? I feel that I have a responsibility to Miguel and to all of my participants, to present their stories just as they would have had they conducted this study.

Figure 7. Components of Miguel’ Doctoral Experience
Introducing Yvette.

“I would say believe in yourself, believe that this is possible, and that you can do this, that you have the ability to do it, that you have the right to do it.”

Yvette is currently a GOTHAM faculty member who is an OPENGATE Program Counselor at Justice College. She was born in Puerto Rico and raised in the Bronx. She was in her 50’s during the time that I interviewed her. Yvette attended her doctoral studies at the Graduate School of Gotham in New York, during the 1990’s, where she attained a Ph.D. in Social Welfare. While attending her doctoral studies, Yvette worked in her current position at Justice and she had an adult son.

My interview experience with Yvette.

My first interview with Yvette took place at her office at Justice where she works. I was supposed to arrive for my appointment at 10:00 am, but I went to the wrong building and arrived late. Yvette was very patient with me and accommodated my interview despite my tardiness. Since we have similar backgrounds, we actually spoke for a while before I turned my tape recorder on. Yvette then proceeded to provide me with nearly a two hour interview. For my second interview with Yvette, we were supposed to meet at her office at 5 p.m. Because I only allowed myself exactly four weeks in between interviews, I barely had enough time to finish transcribing all of participants’ audio recordings. I was typing Yvette’s transcript up until about an hour before I need to leave for my interview with her. I was a bit frazzled by the time I left my hotel room, but I e-mailed her a copy of the transcript prior to our meeting, for her review.
Prior to leaving my hotel room, I typed Yvette’s work address into a computer program that gave me a list of trains that I needed to take and directions for walking. Somehow, I typed the address wrong and I ended up on the opposite side of Manhattan from where I needed to be. When I realized that I was lost, I called Yvette in a panic. At first she did not answer her cellphone, which increased my levels of anxiety. When Yvette returned my call and I told her where I was, she calmed me down and patiently told me not to worry. Apparently, I was within walking distance of the restaurant, Soffritos, where we planned to have dinner after our interview at Justice. Hence, I conducted my second interview with Yvette at Soffritos instead.

Yvette arrived at Soffritos at about 6 p.m. and luckily the restaurant was not crowded. I was able to get us a private area to conduct my interview in the front of the restaurant. The Latin music in the background was still very loud, but there was a privacy curtain that I had the staff close so that the interview would not be interrupted by arriving guests. The interview worked out quite well and afterward we enjoyed the restaurant’s outstanding Puerto Rican fare. After dinner I walked Yvette about twenty blocks toward her apartment, until she had to turn off, while I continued to walk straight toward 42nd street in Manhattan. We said our good-byes and I continued to walk passed 42nd street to my hotel room in Hell’s Kitchen. Needless to say, I slept well that night.

My impression of Yvette.

After interviewing Yvette twice, and spending time with her informally, Yvette impressed me as a warm, caring, patient, but daring individual who I could talk to for hours. Since we both have a background in law enforcement, and have similar research
interests, we had a lot to talk about both on and off tape. After listening to Yvette’s story, Yvette struck me as a brave individual who doesn’t run from confrontation, but can handle it with her probing intelligence and eloquent wit.

**A closer look at Yvette.**

Yvette told me that she was born in San Turce, Puerto Rico and came to the Bronx, New York at the age of three where she lived with her parents. Both of Yvette’s parents are Puerto Rican. Her father was a chef, and her mother, a nurse’s aide. Yvette attended public school in the Bronx until her parents decided to leave and move to Jersey City, New Jersey. Yvette graduated from high school in New Jersey, and then she attended Rutgers University where she earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a Master’s Degree in Social Work.

Yvette said that as soon as she could, she moved to Manhattan where she currently lives. After graduating with her bachelor’s degree, she began a career in social work doing child abuse investigations. She worked with abused children for 10 years when she began to consider a career change because of the negative aspects of the job. It was at this point that Yvette contemplated getting a Ph.D. so she could write about her experiences working with abused children. However, Yvette decided to pursue her interest in community policing instead. She said that she was particularly interested in how the police were serving her community and the relationship building between the police and different communities. Yvette said that based on her educational experiences at Rutgers, she knew that she would eventually get a Ph.D. because she had two Puerto Rican professors at the predominately white college. Yvette said that it was very
encouraging to have these two Puerto Rican professors because other than having one African American teacher in high school, she had no other professors of color teaching her. Yvette indicated that having these two women as mentors led her to believe that, “Wow, we can be professors!”

**Components of Yvette’s Doctoral Experience.**

*Personal Factors as a component- internal facilitator self-efficacy.*

Yvette indicated that it was helpful to her doctoral experience that she strongly identifies with being a black Puerto Rican woman, despite the fact that she has olive colored skin. Yvette said that while she was researching for her dissertation, she examined the phenomenon of drop of blood theory. According to the theory, if you had on drop of black blood you were considered black in America. Yvette explained how this theory helped her to form a stronger sense of identity, and on this basis, Yvette developed a sense of pride in herself that facilitated her doctoral attainment despite the racial discouragement that she had been exposed to. Yvette stated:

I do come from a black Puerto Rican family and throughout my dissertation it helped me to be able to look at that a lot clearer the fact that I was proud to be identified in those areas, the fact that I was the only one in a doctoral program, when I was in my program. I think it instills greater pride in terms of my identity and the fact that yes I can do this. Become a person with a doctoral degree despite anything that anyone has said…for me it instilled a sense of pride in my identity in who I was as a woman, as a Latina. As that, I consider myself a black woman,
and I don’t think I would have been able to come closer to that realization had I not been in a doctoral program doing that kind of thing.

Yvette’s self-efficacy was strengthened by her clear sense of identity coupled with her doctoral accomplishments. However, one barrier that Yvette experienced was related to her lack of finances.

**Personal Factors as a component- external barrier lack finances.**

Yvette initially applied to the Graduate School at GOTHAM and Fordham University for her doctoral studies. Yvette was rejected by GOTHAM but accepted by Fordham. The only problem was that the courses at Fordham were $450 per credit. This meant that Yvette could only take one course at a time. Yvette indicated that finances were definitely an issue for her, and may serve as a deterrent to individuals who are underrepresented who would like to pursue doctoral studies but cannot afford to quit their jobs to attended classes. Yvette commented:

I think funding is an issue. If we could make programs affordable to people, I think also the schedules in programs. Some doctoral programs, people have to leave their jobs because it’s a full time gig and they are not flexible in their scheduling of classes. I think a lot of doctoral programs really have to look at if you want a population to come in that would otherwise not come in, how do you change your scheduling to bring in that adult worker.

**Social role component- role barriers adult learner and worker.**

Yvette experienced instances of social role strain while she was pursuing her doctoral studies. She indicated that the experience was grueling for her because she was
going to school full-time and working at Justice full-time. Yvette said she was too busy at her job to be able to do school work while there. She indicated that despite being overwhelmed, she was able to tend to both her full-time work and school responsibilities by having excellent time management skills. Yvette indicated that the difficult part of the doctoral process is managing school, work, and family responsibilities simultaneously.

As an OPENGATE Counselor at Justice, Yvette has observed her Justice students struggle with the same issues. She said that attending college is especially difficult if you have children or are having to help your parents financially while trying to work on a college degree. Yvette expounded:

As you well know, applying and getting into a Ph.D. program is only a tiny piece of the process. Doing the work and staying there, if you’re like most people, you’ve got to work for a living. Most people don’t have it that they can just go to school. It used to be the norm years ago kids going to college. They just went to college and your parents helped you out…Here, I see it with my students. They got to work ‘cause many of them have children. Many of them have to help their parents, who are so low income that they have to work. And I don’t think that it’s any different for those of us trying to get into Ph.D. programs. We have to work for a living.

Clearly, Yvette had recognized the how social role strain is disadvantageous not only at the doctoral level, but at all levels of collegiate education.
Social role component- role facilitator parent, friend, and religious affiliate.

While Yvette was going through the doctoral process, she had an adult son who became an officer for the New York Police Department. Yvette said that this was helpful because he was able to assist her with the collection of data for her dissertation. Whenever Yvette needed information in a particular area, her son was able to connect her to the appropriate people who could get her the information that she needed.

Yvette indicated that her network of friends and family were indispensable to her doctoral process. Yvette said she that she had friends who would offer encouragement when she felt like quitting, or if she needed someone to proof read a paper, her friends were available for that too. Yvette explained how her friends and family served as support:

Sometimes I would look for some kind of motivation, because you want to quit when you are dealing with obstacles in every area. There comes a point when you say, can I really do this? I want to quit…You almost become self-defeated; I really can’t do this. But if you have external support, that does motivate you, and it helps you to see that you have a chance. You have an opportunity to do this, to take it, to show people exactly what you are made of. That sort of changes the situation for you and it allows you to go in and be able to deal with those defeaters, with the defeatist attitude that you have to contend with on an almost daily basis when you’re doing your doctorate. So for me there were several motivators. I think my students motivated me because they were proud that I was in a doctoral program doing this, and it helped them have an attitude of wow I can
do this too because I’m like them. And that was in a sense encouraging for me in many ways. My friends and family were extremely motivating in many ways, in more ways that I could possibly think. And I don’t think I would have gone through, or succeeded had it not been for friends and family. That was a real motivating factor. Other than that, I think would have had more challenges in my life trying to get through, believing in myself, that I could do it.

Yvette also said that as an outlet, she would go Latin dancing with a group of friends. This helped her to face her week of balancing school and work with a more relaxed attitude. Yvette stated:

Another outlet for me to release some stress was I like Latin music. I like to go dancing and I have another group of female friends who do that every so often. I couldn’t do it as much as I would have liked, but at the very least once every other month or so, it would be, ok, we’re going out. We’re going dancing and it wasn’t about going out to meet anybody, it was about going out dancing, hearing music and enjoying ourselves so that when Monday started and we were in the rat race between work and going to school, you were relaxed about it.

The role of religion was a significant facilitator to Yvette’s doctoral experience. Yvette indicated that she is a very spiritual person who belongs to a prayer group of women who support one another. Yvette said that while she was working on her doctorate and experiencing issues related to the social construction of race, the prayer group prayed for her. This helped her to relax and feel that she could deal with any discouragement that she encountered in a positive way. Yvette relayed:
Well I have a really good web, of what we call prayer warriors. I’m very spiritual. I belong to a prayer group, all women, and we pray for each other, for anything that we need and we sort of have a prayer circle. If we can’t meet, we do it through e-mail and we send out concerns and we meet once a month to discuss the prayers for the month that we need to be praying about. And these women, when I was experiencing all the issues that came up, whether it was stress, whether it was issues related to sociopolitical constructions of race or anything else, discouragement, they prayed and they prayed hard, and for me that was a good outlet to be able to relax and be able to know that I had some support in anything that I was doing.

Yvette recalled the support she received from her prayer group while she was defending her dissertation:

I remember when I went to do my dissertation defense, they noted the time. When I was in that defense, I felt those prayers and it gave me a sense of being able to pull through and be strong about it and I felt their presence through their prayers with me. It really impacted my presentation during the dissertation, as well as everything else that I was writing. I don’t think that I would have gotten through without knowing that they were there and supportive in that process.

*Cultural component- facilitators.*

*Latino role models.*

Yvette was confident about attending doctoral studies because she had two Puerto Rican professors while she was attending Rutgers for her bachelor’s and Master’s
degrees. Yvette said that one of the professors was from the department of Puerto Rican studies, Maritza Canino, and the other was from the social work department, Evelyn Edlago, who encouraged Yvette’s interest in social work. Yvette said of these two professors:

…they became my mentors and showed me that wow, we can be college professors, ya know, look at them, they’re here. They got Ph.Ds. They are the only women I’ve ever seen at this level and they were very active and political in the institution as well, which was amazing because it was a time when there were a lot of demonstrations against institutions of higher education for not being fair to people of color. Not allowing us in to the colleges. I mean there were tons of things. I remember that we did so many demonstrations, you know, we took over the president’s office. I remember one year at Rutgers because not enough minorities were getting into the college and these women were the focal point of that. Of opening up our minds from a political perspective of being able to do things for your community to make sure that the younger people got served and got a piece of that American Pie that everyone was entitled to.

Yvette said that having these two mentors influenced her to continue in higher education and to be willing to fight for it. Yvette said that Canino and Edlago created her Master’s in Social Work program, which was a creative program to attract more Latinos to the field of social work. Yvette said that all of the students in her Master’s program were Latino and most were Puerto Rican. Yvette described the program as follows:
Everyone in my class was Latino, predominately Puerto Ricans, which was unheard of. This is 1982-84. And it was a real creative program based on developing research and writing, and at the end of the program, Rutgers’s University Press actually published a book in which all our articles got in, all of our thesis that we had been working on in the Master’s program and that had never been done before.

Yvette said that she felt privileged to have these two mentors that she could go to for assistance. Yvette said that when you enter a Ph.D. program and don’t have anyone who looks like you, that has had the same life experiences, you become isolated. Yvette stated, “Other people could sort of help you out but you’re looking for that connection and that becomes very significant to be able to make those cultural connections to people that have had similar experience.” Yvette indicated that this empowers you and makes you believe that you can do this, can attain a doctorate.

Yvette further explained the consequences of not having a Latino mentor available through the education process. Yvette indicated that it is helpful to have had a family member who has gone through the process because it can be discouraging when you are the first in your family to graduate with a college degree. Yvette stated of this experience:

I think one of the issues for me was often times how in Latino communities we are encouraged to pursue an education. Our parents do a good job of encouraging us in those areas, yet our parents haven’t gone passed the undergraduate levels. They encourage us to do that and they are proud of us, but they do not know what
it takes to go through those experiences. So, most of us are first generation, whether it is undergrad, masters, or Ph.D. We are usually the first in our family to go into that direction. And there is a lot of social pressure. I think there are a lot of influences to discourage us.

*Cultural component-barriers.*

*Negative event by ethnicity.*

Yvette described her overall doctoral experience as disappointing after having a Master’s experience that was both good and bad. Yvette said that her Master’s process was good because it was a comfortable experience. During that process, Yvette had access to role models who looked like her and the experience encouraged her to move on to the Ph.D. level. Yvette said that she thought that her positive Master’s experience was going to continue during her Ph.D. experience. Yvette said that when she reached the Ph.D. level (at the GOTHAM Graduate Center) she experienced discrimination perpetrated by Prospect faculty and administrators. She relayed that she was astonished by what she experienced because she was enrolled at the Prospect College Graduate school of Social Work, a program designed to produce social workers who would work within the African American and Latino communities. Yvette indicated that her bad experiences at the Prospect began with her admission process.

Yvette said that after she decided to pursue her doctorate, she applied to both the Graduate Center at GOTHAM and Fordham University. Yvette was rejected by GOTHAM, but accepted by Fordham. Yvette was disappointed because GOTHAM was
much more affordable than Fordham, and Yvette did not have financial aid. She indicated that when GOTHAM rejected her, she called to find out why. Yvette recounted:

I was pretty shocked that Fordham accepted me but GOTHAM didn’t, and because GOTHAM was so much affordable I decided to call and ask what was some of the reasoning ‘cause I said maybe I could reapply, since I figured thousands of years to finish at Fordham at one class a semester, and at GOTHAM I could take 3 or 4 for the price of one class at Fordham. I was told by the chair of the doctoral program that I did not have as many publications out already as the people were taken in that year. And I said, gee, I though the purpose of a Ph.D. program was to begin to help you develop research so that you could become a scholar through publication. I thought that that was one of the emphasis, at least in the research component. So I thought that was odd…

Yvette said that at the time, one of her mentors during her Master’s program, Maritza Canino was on the Board of Trustees for GOTHAM. Yvette and Canino had lunch one day and Canino asked her how her doctoral program was going. Canino knew that Yvette applied to GOTHAM because several professors that Canino were familiar with provided Yvette with letters of recommendations. When Yvette told Canino that she did not get in, Canino said that the explanation that Yvette was given did not sound right. Canino said that she would “look into it.” Unbeknownst to Yvette, Canino spoke with the President of Prospect College, and Canino had the Chair put something in writing explaining why Yvette was not accepted. Yvette said that she did not expect the college
to get back with her. She expected Canino to contact Yvette with an explanation. She said that one day she received a call from Canino with some unexpected news. Yvette stated:

…One day she calls me, she says, I’m sending you a packet that includes a letter explaining what happened. Now, I have to tell you had it not been because she was a Trustee, and she was someone I trusted, and she was a mentor, and someone I admired, I probably would have never seen that letter. But I got the letter, which I still hold to this day, basically saying that they did not have a reason for not accepting me that research was not a criteria to be admitted, published research, and that there was no explanation. Basically there was no explanation for it. My grades were good…and I basically had everything I needed, so there was no justification for it.

Because of this experience, Yvette decided to investigate to see who was applying to the Prospect doctoral program and who was getting admitted by ethnicity and race. Yvette said that she went back five years and discovered that only 15 students were admitted per year and only two Latinos were admitted every other year. During the years that Latinos were admitted, two African American students were admitted instead. Yvette recalled:

I went 5 years down and I noticed that there was an issue that occurred every other year in the past 5 years. I did not go further than that cause it figured that it would probably be worse after that…Between 1990 and five years down, two Latinos got in every other year and they would rotate, one year it would be two African Americans and the next year it would be two Latinos. One year it would
be two African, the next year it would be two Latinos and I found that very interesting and I think what occurred the year that I applied was that that year was the year for two African Americans…but they didn’t say that, because that’s against the law, so, they found other reasons to reject me.

Yvette said that after she received the letter stating that there was no explanation for her application to be rejected by GOTHAM, she received a call from GOTHAM encouraging her to reapply to the doctoral program. Yvette stated:

I got a call from the doctoral program from GOTHAM and they said, ‘We noticed that you did not reapply for the program’ and I said, ‘That’s interesting how many people do you call who don’t get accepted and don’t reapply.’ And they said, ‘You know your stuff just came across our desk,’ and I said, I knew why my stuff had come across their desk because the President had inquired about my situation and they said, you know what, you should really apply again, you have very good chances of getting in…I said to GOTHAM, well I’ll think about it, and I know I wanted to apply cause I knew that’s where I could afford to really go to school and as I was thinking about it. About two weeks later, I got a letter of acceptance. They did not even wait for my application. I just got a letter saying congratulations you have been accepted and I said, ‘Well I’ll be.’ And that’s when I realized, as in many things in life, it’s who you know that can pave the way for you and bring you opportunities in life. My luck was that this woman who is a mentor to this day, Puertorriqueña, Ph.D., incredible educator, happened to be
there for me. And I’m forever grateful of that opportunity and for God putting her in my life.

Yvette said that considering that she applied to the Prospect Social Work program, she was surprised when she was discriminated against because she expected the program to be cognizant of diversity. However, this not what Yvette experienced and this is not what she observed. Yvette indicated that the Prospect Social Work program faculty was not diverse, but were mostly Jewish. Yvette added that the New York educational system is currently and has historically been controlled predominately by Jewish people. Yvette explicated:

I would think in a city like New York in an area like social work they would be a little more cognizant of diversity because when you are preparing social workers to go out and work in the field, whether it be at the undergraduate, Master’s, or doctoral level, they’re going to be dealing with a diversity of people, so they need to be very cognizant of the populations they are going to serve, of the cultural issues and factors that they may encounter in serving those populations, and in making sure that in a school that is preparing people to go out there, that you have representatives from every group that is representative of the city.

Yvette said that when she was accepted to the program there were no Asians or East Indians, and the year that Yvette was admitted only one other Latino was admitted who was of Cuban ethnicity. Yvette commented:

How do you choose just two people out of a group of fifteen. Where we the only two Latinos that applied? I doubt it. Were we the only two minorities that
applied? I doubt it. I know how I stood out. I stood out because somebody wrote a letter, but how did we compare to the others who applied, who I’m sure was just as qualified to be in that program?

I asked Yvette if the other people who were accepted were White and she said other than an molto gay female, who appeared racially white, and an Irish gay male, everyone else who was accepted was Jewish.

Yvette said that to add insult to injury, after she was admitted to her doctoral program, she was given an incredibly racist advisor. Yvette told me about her first meeting with this problematic individual:

To add insult to injury for me, they gave an advisor who was incredibly racist. How do I know that? He gave very clear examples of it. In my first meeting with him he asked me, tell me a little bit about yourself. I was telling him that I was born in Puerto Rico and he said, ‘Oh, so you’re actually a real Puerto Rican, you know, because you were born there.’ I said but most Puerto Ricans I know who were born here in the city consider themselves real Puerto Ricans as well. Place of birth is not the factor, you know. It’s the culture, whether you are born here or there, we are very proud of where we come from, what we are associated with, our culture. We have a sense of nationalism that brings us together regardless of where we are born. And that was the beginning of it.

Yvette told me about her second meeting with her advisor, which wasn’t much better:

In my second meeting I walk in. He is talking, he was a member of the English only movement, so if I walked in, he had to educate me on English only and he
clearly knew that I wasn’t for that cause I would say to him, you know what, in my perception it’s better to know more than less, so if you know more than one language that makes you, having greater abilities being able to do a whole lot more than someone who doesn’t have a second language. So we would, those were our conversations all the time.

Yvette told me about several more instances where Prospect faculty were blatantly racist. This next account was an especially egregious incident on the part of Yvette’s advisor, who was also her professor for a course she was taking on social policy. One day Yvette’s advisor/professor decided to teach the class about his theory explaining why the grass in Central Park was dying in certain areas. Yvette provided the following narrative:

…Professor Grisly was his name, comes into class and his conversation begins by him saying, ‘You know those areas in Central Park where there is no grass.’ And some people are, yeah. ‘I know of places in Central Park where the grass is dying off,’ and he says, ‘Well the reason that there’s no grass in those areas is because the Hispanic community comes in with their boom boxes and puts them on, and they dance, and they kill the grass in those areas because they have no conception of grass and trees.’ And I remember that my 3 classes mates, I felt their eyes burning on me because they all just looked at me and my Cuban colleague and we looked at each other and we were like, do you want to take this or should I? So I said to him, ‘I beg to differ with you.’ I said, ‘Let me start with the boom boxes. The boom boxes are not a Latino invention. They are actually an invention of all
of you Caucasian people who introduced us to it. Yeah, we love music. Yeah, we love to dance. Yes we take an opportunity to do it you know, where ever we can because that’s our social outlet. However, we can not only tell you about grass and trees, we can tell you how you can put leaves and grass and tree bark together to make teas that can either cure you or kill you….As a matter a fact, your people spend a lot of time in these rain forests trying to get the drugs that are going to cure cancer or cure major illness. So Puerto Rican people are very familiar with what grass and trees are in our community.’

Yvette said that every class with Dr. Grisly was this way, battles over issues related to the Latino community. These battles caused Yvette great concern. First, Yvette felt that this professor was feeding the class misinformation. Second, Dr. Grisly was her advisor and Yvette did not know how she was going to move ahead in her doctoral program with an advisor who did not respect her as an individual because of her background. Yvette expounded:

Never mind the other issues that I thought, how can this man continue to train social workers who are going out to work with my community in a fair way that really educates them to the issues that concern my community…how was I going to write a dissertation that involves my community and have him look at in any kind of fair way?

Yvette witnessed numerous instances of racism. Some incidents were blatant, like the comments often made by her advisor, and other incidents were subtle conversation among faculty that was not meant to be overheard. Yvette told me about a discussion that
she overhead between two professors while they were on line at the cafeteria at Hunter.

Yvette said:

Yeah, there were discussions that I’m sure that people didn’t want you to here. I came across one discussion one time that I’m sure and again it involved this one professor, he happened to be there, but he was speaking with another professor who, I was also in his class, and I was in the cafeteria on line waiting to buy something to eat and they happened to be in front of me. Now, during that time the Prospect’s Graduate School of Social Work was interviewing for deans of the school. Apparently one of the candidates that made it to the interview process was an African American male. So, I’m in the cafeteria and these two professors, one who I clearly knew was a racist, based on personal experience with him and the other one shocked me, cause I had him for a class and I thought he was somewhat more sensitive and I hear him say, ‘Well that black man is getting that job over my dead body.’ I said, ‘My God.’ So you really begin to think, what real opportunities are there, real opportunities out there for people to come into the system, if that is the frame of thinking of senior faculty members who have a vote in the process.

Yvette indicated that she did not have a sense of community during her doctoral process. Yvette felt that some of the faculty made her feel that she was not part of that community because she did not look like them. Yvette said that she did not feel like she was part of the program until two faculty members gave her a sense of welcome. One of
those individuals would eventually replace Dr. Grisly as Yvette’s new advisor, and the
other would become Yvette’s dissertation chair.

Social component- facilitator.

Faculty Support.

Although some of the faculty in Yvette’s doctoral program made her feel
unwelcome, two individuals eventually assisted her. When Yvette was having difficulty
with her academic advisor, Dr. Grisly, she went to the chair of her doctoral program and
attempted to replace him. At first she was told that her advisor could not be replaced.
Yvette then spoke to the only female professor that she had, who agreed to be Yvette’s
advisor. Yvette shared her story as follows:

Well, I went to the chair of the program and I explained to him what was
happening and how I felt and he basically said to me, well we can’t change your
advisor and I said well you know what that does not work for me. I said you
know, I am a faculty member in addition to being a student there. I was also a
faculty member at GOTHAM. So yeah, I wanted a little professional courtesy as
well. None of which I received at the beginning and then, one of my professors in
one of my classes in my second year was this fabulous Jewish woman who I
really developed a connection with because of the issues she was looking at and
the sensitivity I felt she offered and she brought to the class and um, I spoke to
her, and I said to her, ‘I’m going crazy. I’m having this issue with my advisor. I
can’t continue. I’m going leave this institution because there is no way I can
reconcile being able to finish here with his advice.’ She knew of him. She
understood exactly what I was saying and she said to me, I’m going to take care of that. So she spoke to the chair of the doctoral program and basically what she did she asked to have me as her advisee and they finally moved me to her. And that’s when I felt that real progress began for me…

Yvette said that after her advisor was changed, she began to make substantial progress. Yvette now had an advisor who she could talk to without being condemned for her ethnicity. Yvette described how she met her dissertation chair who offered Yvette support and made her feel welcomed. Yvette told me how they met:

We had two different defenses. One was obviously your proposal, but prior to your proposal you had to, at the end of your first year, not only take a qualifying exam, but also pick an area where you can discuss before a committee of faculty that you felt strongly about in terms of social policy…It just so happened that one of the people on the committee was this person who was one of her [Yvette’s advisor] colleagues. They wrote together a lot, published a lot. They did a lot of stuff on group work and since I was looking a community organizational issues, in essence group work with communities…So, any way, he was on the committee and he liked my presentation and told her.

Yvette said that when it was time to get a dissertation committee together, Yvette knew that her advisor would be on her committee. However, since Yvette’s advisor was really affiliated more with the Social Work Master’s program as opposed to the doctoral program, Yvette’s advisor was not qualified to be a dissertation chair. But Yvette’s
advisor’s colleague, Dr. Tilapia was qualified, and this is who became Yvette’s dissertation chair. Yvette recounted as follows:

Dr. Tilapia was in the doctoral program and she said to me you know he really liked your presentation. When he came out of there he was talking to me about it. He was excited about it. You should ask him to be your chair, so I did and he agreed.

Yvette said that it was ironic that Dr. Tilapia came into her life at her time of need, and Yvette said, “I always have such faith in God how things happen.” Not only did Dr. Tilapia and Yvette connect because he enjoyed the presentation that she did, but unbeknownst to both of them, Dr. Tilapia was working on a grant with Yvette’s cousin, Ivy Burmaster. When Yvette told Dr. Tilapia that Ivy was her cousin the relationship between Yvette and Dr. Tilapia became solidified. Yvette indicated.

Well apparently he had written a grant and my cousin had been working with him on the funding for that grant…. I went to visit my cousins for a weekend and she’s asking me about the program, she says, hey I’ve been working with someone from the social work program. Do you know Robert Tilapia? And I said, yeah, I know him quite well. And she says oh really, I just gave him a grant for, I don’t know, a hundred million dollars or something like that and I said, really. I said oh my God, he is the chair of my dissertation committee and I said, you’re kidding me. I come back and he and I are having a meeting and I said to him, you know, Ivy Burmaster sends her regards. And he said, ‘You know Ivy!’ And I said, all her life and mine. He says, ‘how do you know Ivy?’ I said, ‘she’s my cousin.’
And he said, ‘Oh, my God.’ Well, it couldn’t have happened any better. Never mind that the man had originally liked me because of something I presented, now he was my buddy because he loved my cousin. And certainly the relationship flourished and he was very instrumental in his editing, advise, that was given to me throughout my dissertation process and I really think that had it not been for these two individuals who came into my life in that program it would have gone very differently for me because there was no real connection there and I don’t think administratively there was an effort to want to establish those connections between faculty and students unless you were not a person of color.

Yvette said that had it not been for her advisor and dissertation chair, things would have gone much differently for her during her doctoral program, because Yvette did not feel connected to her program otherwise. Yvette said that if you were a person of color, the faculty at her doctoral program made no attempt to connect with you. Yvette said that this is an issue that institutions need to look at.

Peer network.

Yvette relayed that she quickly made friends with the Irish gay male, the Jewish African American woman, and the Latina student. Yvette said that the four were drawn together; they formed study groups, helped each other out, and talked about the class dynamics. They would be creative and would split up the course readings and they would share the information with each other. Yvette said that she did not get to know the rest of her classmates except for those three that she came to rely on.
Social component- barrier.

Social class.

Yvette experienced issues related to social class. Yvette said that the faculty within her doctoral program expressed a sense of privilege that was based on class structure. Yvette said that the faculty made people that were different from themselves feel as if they did not belong because these others could never live up to the faculty’s social class. Yvette said that she survived because she has a strong sense of identity. Yvette indicated:

And in that respect I think I survived that. It’s almost like you feel like a survivor of something because in a doctoral program a lot of people feel that this is a special group. It’s a privileged membership and you have to go through all these major obstacles in order to become a part of that group.

Yvette said in this respect, her doctoral experience was very classist, which was a shame because the social work program should have been designed to work with people like Yvette.

Gender.

Yvette said that with exception of one individual, all of her professors were male. Yvette indicated that the chair of the department was male as was the dean, and most of the instructors except for one was male. Although, the faculty seemed to have more sensitivity to gender than race and ethnicity, there was still the issue of being able to identify. Yvette questioned, “Where are the women?” The fact that there were no women
teachers, administrators, or people of color filling these positions, made Yvette raise questions. Yvette stated:

I have to admit that it was extremely challenging, because I kept seeing it and kept asking, why isn’t this different? I’m in New York. I’m not in some remote place where my people aren’t in large numbers. My people are in large numbers here. I know that we exist out there as professors, people with Ph.D.’s. So, every day I would say to myself what is wrong with this picture.

Yvette said that she was angry over this issue for quite some time.

Yvette’s survival tactics.

Yvette survived her doctoral experience by having an unwavering sense of identity that made her resistant to the multiple episodes of racism and discrimination that she encountered. She was able to find a network of students that she could rely on to help her with her course work. Yvette kept an open line of communication with friends and family who offered her encouragement and served as a source of motivation. Finally, Yvette found solace in her spirituality and she participated in prayer.

Yvette’s Advice to Others.

When I asked Yvette to offer advice to other Latinos who are working on their doctorates or who are thinking of pursuing a doctorate, she poignantly said, “I would say believe in yourself, believe that this is possible, and that you can do this, that you have the ability to do it, that you have the right to do it.” Yvette also said that if you are working on your doctorate, you should look to those people in your life or family who can give you the support that you need. Yvette said that you should let your family know
what you are experiencing and she said, “Don’t neglect them in the process of getting all this work done.” She also advised that you should enjoy yourself every now and then, because if you don’t the process can drive you nuts. Yvette also indicated that you should find people within your culture that can serve as mentors. Your mentors don’t have to be part of your program or part of your community, they just have to be people that believe in you. Yvette said, “So believe in yourself and then find others who will also believe in you too.”

As far as suggestions for institutions, Yvette said that admission processes for doctoral programs need to be looked at. She indicated that she thinks that Latinos are applying to these programs, but they are not being accepted. Yvette said that we need to look at the reasons why. Is it funding? Is it time? Is it scheduling issues? Is it course work? Yvette said, “I think being able to identify what the legitimate factors are that are keeping us from entering higher education in mass numbers really needs to be addressed.” After calling several sources, I was unable to gain access to GOTHAM School of Social Work admissions statistics. However, I was able to find evidence of GOTHAM’s struggle with issues related to the admissions of minorities in general.

According to articles that I found, GOTHAM’s predecessor, the Free Academy, was founded in 1847 in order to provide the opportunity for higher education to disadvantaged individuals living in New York City. However, it was not until 1969 that the University committed to opening its doors to Black and Latino students who had been virtually excluded up to that point. On April 22, 1969, a group of OPENGATE students, along with other Black and Latino students at GOTHAM College, initiated the Open
Admissions Strike, which resulted in the greatest integration of higher education outside of the South in the history of the United States. Open admissions at GOTHAM guaranteed that every New York City high school graduate would be granted admission to GOTHAM. However, the new open admissions policy did not come without backlash. Up until 1976, tuition at GOTHAM was free. In 1976, GOTHAM’s freshman class was predominantly non-white the first year that open enrollment was implemented. 1976 also happened to be the first year that GOTHAM imposed tuition, which resulted in the drop of non-white students by 4 percentage points.

The attack on open admissions did not end with the enactment of tuition at GOTHAM. In the mid 1990’s, George Pataki became New York State’s governor, and Rudolph Giuliani became the mayor. The two appointed individuals to the Board of Trustees who, in the name of “higher standards,” began developing plans to restrict senior college admissions with the use of standardized testing. Before the new policy was adopted, GOTHAM administrators presented data indicating that the testing requirement would result in the exclusion of students of color from bachelor’s degree programs. Despite this evidence, GOTHAM implemented the new admissions policy anyhow and some writers believe that the practice of using invalid standardized tests help perpetuate the social class and racial structure of our society-an outcome that many tacitly approve of. These writers believe that the increases in GOTHAM tuition and cuts to financial aid that occurred in the 1990’s served the same purpose: to create unequal access to education thereby keeping people of color in poverty and in a state of social subordination in this country. In conclusion, based on GOTHAM’s past struggle with
admissions policy, it appears that the issue still needs to be addressed, not only at the baccalaureate level but at the graduate level as well.

Yvette pointed out the need for GOTHAM graduate admissions policy to be address and she also commented about the role of Latino faculty. Yvette said that Latinos in faculty positions need to support our young people so that they can make it too. Having a high representation of Latino faculty will help some of the myths that we have in our educational system and in our community that we can’t reach that far, that we can’t make it. Latinos need to be shown that we have an equal opportunity to achieve the dreams that all Americans have, and that we are not second class citizens.

Yvette said that there will be people that will discourage Latinos and try and make us feel like we are not capable because of our ethnicity. Yvette indicated that this discouragement is based on the social construction of race in America. Yvette explicated:

I think a lot of people begin to discourage you in ways to make you feel you’re not capable. You don’t have the ability. Your people don’t do this. This is something you don’t do, doesn’t come natural to you, and I think if you let all of those pressures that are surrounded by the social construction of race in America, or the socio political constructions of race in America, most people won’t do it, because they will absolutely feel that this isn’t something they could reach for.

And I think that has been an influence throughout education in America.

Yvette concluded that Latinos are basically told by the American mainstream that you can get a high school education, or undergraduate education, but there isn’t a real
push to motivate and encourage Latinos to continue beyond that. This becomes an
obstacle for many, and Latino faculty need to work to change that.

**Summary: Yvette.**

Yvette described her doctoral experience as negative. One personal factor that helped Yvette to survive her experience was her high level of self-efficacy, which is related to her clear sense of identity. One personal factor that served as a barrier was Yvette’s lack of finances while she was attending Fordham University. The financial pressure ceased once she was accepted to the Graduate Center at GOTHAM, but she was met with a host of other problems. One social role barrier that she experienced was related to the obligations of simultaneously juggling a full-time job with full-time doctoral coursework. Social roles that were facilitators included support from Yvette’s adult son, her family, friends, and her spiritual work with her prayer group. In terms of cultural factors, Yvette had two Puerto Rican role models who served as her professors during her Master’s program. One of these professors was instrumental in getting Yvette accepted to Prospect’s doctoral level Social Work program, where Yvette experienced egregious instances of racism by her first academic advisor. Yet another barrier that Yvette encountered at Prospect was related to social class and gender. Yvette felt that the faculty within her doctoral program were classist and discouraging of Yvette’s doctoral success. Yvette was also bothered by the fact that there was only one female professor, and no professors of color in the program she was in. All the other professors and administrators were Jewish males, when most social workers are women and the community that the students were being trained to serve were African American, Latino,
and other people of color. Social factors that facilitated Yvette’s doctoral experience included help from three other peers and the one female professor in the program who agreed to replace Yvette’s problematic first advisor.

**After the Interviews: bracketing my feelings about Yvette.**

Since Yvette and I both have a background in law enforcement and have similar research interests, we immediately developed a strong rapport. To me, meeting someone like Yvette was like meeting a long lost cousin and of all my research participants, I spent the most time with her. After spending several hours in New York with Yvette and listening to and reading her story numerous times, I felt sympathetic to her negative doctoral experiences. This especially applies to her experiences with racism, since she was able to articulate and recall the details of what she experienced so well. Therefore, in writing the details of her story, I had to be careful not to demonize those individuals that offended Yvette during her doctoral experience, or deify those who mentored her. I had to be equal careful not to portray Yvette as a victim or a victor but as individual who lived through the experience of attaining a doctorate. This was not easy to do. It would have been much easier to take sides and color Yvette’s story through my own perception and feelings about it.
Introducing Victor.

“And don’t stop dancing.”

Victor is currently a GOTHAM faculty member who is an OPENGATE Program Counselor at Big Metropolis Community College (BMCC). He was born and raised in New York. During the time that I interviewed him, he was in his 40’s. Victor attended a Doctor of Philosophy distance program offered by Orange Peel University, Florida, in the 1990’s. While attending his doctoral studies, Victor was employed part-time, as an OPENGATE Program Counselor at BMCC.

My interview experience with Victor.

Both of my interviews with Victor were conducted at his office at the Big Metropolis Community College (BMCC), for a total of 1 hour and 36 minutes of recorded interview time. My first interview with Victor took place on February 25 at
10:30 a.m. I remember being very excited to start my day because I anticipated interviewing Victor and one other individual at Prospect College before being able to go back to my hotel room to prepare for my trip back home to Tampa the next day. When I woke up in the morning, I intended to follow my usual routine of getting dressed and going down to the hotel diner to have breakfast before walking to the train. Only on this day, I woke up to snow flurries, which instantly put me in a festive mood. I could see a thin blanket of snow on the building roof tops from my hotel room window, but the snow was too wet to stick to the ground, so I was not very concerned.

When I got off the train on my way to BMCC, it started to snow heavier. I had just arrived at BMCC when the participant that I was to interview after Victor called me to cancel the interview due to inclement weather. I was disappointed but the snow was so beautiful that my mood remained unfazed. I arrived early enough to walk around BMCC and take pictures when I noticed that the snow was coming downside ways! Still not worried about the implications of having to walk back to the train with a pair of loafers on, I interviewed Victor and left the interview uplifted knowing that I was done with my first series of interviews.

**My Impression of Victor.**

After my interviews with Victor, he impressed me as a caring, resilient, well balanced person who knows what he wants. What amazed me most about Victor’s account was that he was able to complete his doctorate without detrimental disruption to his workout routines and familial relationships. I thought, this is someone that I can learn something from. In fact, during my second interview with him, Victor offered me a
pragmatic piece of advice. Just before I turned off my recorder he popped up in his chair and said very wide eyed, “And don’t stop dancing.”

A Closer Look at Victor.

Victor indicated that he is a tenured Associate Professor at the Big Metropolis Community College who is an OPENGATE Counselor and Sociology Professor. Victor said that both of his parents are from Ponce, Puerto Rico, and he is one of eight siblings. He is the second youngest sibling and he was born and raised in New York. Victor indicated that he has been to Puerto Rico many times because of his desire to connect with Puerto Ricans from the island. He indicated that his interest in Puerto Rico was ignited during his freshman year while pursuing his bachelor’s degree. He said that he had room for an elective so he decided to take Puerto Rican history. Victor had not known much about the history of Puerto Rico because such topics are not taught by the New York City public school system.

Victor added that his parents, who are now both deceased, migrated to the United States mainland in the 1950’s after having their first child. Victor said that his parents migrated because the opportunities in Puerto Rico were slim, and Victor’s father had only a 6th grade education and his mother, only a 3rd grade education. When Victor’s father came to United States his procured a job as a superintendent. One of the benefits of being a superintendent was a free apartment, which contributed to the family’s stability. Victor’s mother worked too; she worked in a factory that produced plastic covers for furniture, which are now obsolete.
When I asked Victor to expound on his desire to connect to people in Puerto Rico and what that meant to his identity, he said that it made his identity more clear, and that clarity came from language. Victor told me about an incident that inspired him to strengthen his Spanish speaking skills, which helped him identify more with being Puerto Rican. Today, Victor speaks fluently in both English and Spanish, and when he visits Puerto Rico, the native Puerto Ricans can no longer tell that Victor is a Nuyorican. Victor explained:

I would go to Puerto Rico, and then I would go into some of the restaurants and order some food. And I remember really vividly, ‘cause this is where it came from. I remember vividly asking for coffee in Spanish. So I go to a restaurant. I say, “Dame un café [give me a coffee].” Uh, it didn’t come out like that. And the woman said to me, “Tu no eres Puertorriqueño [you are not Puerto Rican].” Um, I go, “Come así [how so].” She says, “Tu no hablas como los Puertorriqueños. Aquí no pide café así. Tu hablas un pocito Dominicano [You do not speak like a Puerto Rican. You do not order coffee like that here. You talk a little bit like a Dominican].” Is that ok for this interview? Uh, it sounds Dominican she said. And that had to do with a friend that I had here that was Dominican. So when we would speak in Spanish. You know, you kind of assimilate some of the language intonations. I had a lot of friends from the church and things like that, so I kind of internalized some of that language. When she said those things to me, I was hurt. I felt bad, you know, I did not say anything, but I really did feel bad inside. And it made me, it made me want to do something about it.
Victor explained how he reacquired his Spanish:

So I did. I would keep going back to Puerto Rico and I would talk to my family and cousins and start meeting friends and hear how they conversed in Spanish. And started internalizing some of that language, uh, communication skills. So that when I would go back five years later, no one was able to distinguish me from not being Puerto Rican. Sometimes people don’t believe that I never even trained on the island, or had any educational experience on the island. Um, that’s how strong I got with language. So, my search for identity and for cultural identity started with that problem. It was a language problem and not being able to express myself as fluently in Spanish as I can in English. Today still I’m dominant in English. We live in an English dominant educational society so everything I have done, all the degrees are all in English, so clearly my command of the language is all in English. But I have good command of language in Spanish too. So I’m comfortable where I am right now with that.

As far the degrees that Victor attained, Victor earned his bachelor’s degree from Leman College his Master’s from Long Island University, and his doctorate from OrangePeel University. Victor said that OrangePeel’s doctoral program was a Florida based distance program that required him to attend classes in Philadelphia on a monthly basis.
Components of Victor’s Doctoral Experience.

Personal Factors as a component- internal/external barriers self-efficacy and lack of finances.

Barriers that Victor encountered during his doctoral process emanated from personal factors including his sense of self-efficacy and financial limitations. One personal factor that served as a facilitator was Victor’s ability to visualize himself at graduation.

Victor said that during his dissertation process, he had three white committee members. Although they did nothing overt, Victor said that he felt they were especially picky during the process. In the back of his mind, he questioned if they were being overly critical because they doubted if Victor could do doctoral level work as a Puerto Rican. Victor admitted that this perception came from him, based on his experiences with his committee. Victor said, “The perception came from me.” Victor explained his frustration at the iterations of submission while he was at his dissertation proposal stage. Victor said:

So you work on the project, submit, they send it back. You revise it, you submit again, they send it back. You keep going through these iterations of review and rewrites and that was the proposal period. I did not understand the whole process. When I stepped back a little bit I’m saying to myself, I see what’s happening here, I got these three individuals who don’t necessarily come from the same perspective. They did not approach the review in the same way. One of the members was a little easy going. One was tough and the other was super tough in terms of sometimes some trivial things. I mean what I would call trivial things.
Maybe they weren’t as trivial as I’m putting it, but. So then, that was the period when I started seeing it as three white men checking out the Puerto Rican and seeing if he could write…You know seeing if he could engage in this level of work.

I asked Victor to explain if there was something that his committee did, or was it something that he perceived that made him believe that his committee doubted his abilities because of his ethnicity. Victor replied:

You know…never…not overtly, never really overtly. I just, there were periods when I could not understand why some piece of what I was working on was being scrutinized as strongly as it was being scrutinized. So it kind of made me push a little harder. They never overtly referenced my culture, never referenced Puerto Ricans. They did not do that. I think for me it was an internal kind of processing of what was happening. And I’m not sure that among each other that the subject may have been broached, but certainly not overtly.

I probed to see if Victor could explain the basis of his perceptions. Victor indicated perhaps he was really questioning his own abilities to complete the doctoral process:

Victor explicated:

It could have come from my own subjectivity, my own self-perception as possibly questioning my ability to do this, questioning my ability to complete this process, questioning my own strength, in being able to do this in comparison to these guys who had what they had. So it kind of forces you, at some point there is a vulnerability stage. You know your work is really being tested. Your work is
really being tested to see if it meets the muster that is expected of someone who holds a doctorate, so it is a period of vulnerability that probably that I could talk about now but I don’t know that I would see it that way when I was going through the process. When you are going through the process you are really immersed. Its post completion that you finally start thinking about things in another ways. That you see, it could have been really my own doubts that caused me to reflect in a particular way.”

Victor brought up a good point in stating that his perception of his experience with self-doubt may be different now that he is no longer immersed in that experience. It could be that Victor is now able to interpret his professors’ scrutiny more clearly years after having already completed his doctorate.

One barrier to Victor’s doctoral experience was his lack of finances. Victor said that he could not afford a good lap top, which rendered him unprepared for the first day of class. Victor recalled those first days:

So I was relating that experience to kind of one of the first days of class when I went to my doctoral program. The first week of class, there were readings assigned and of course you have a syllabus. You have the things that they expect, and some assignments were due the first day. I remember not being ready. I wasn’t ready. And the other students, my counter parts, many of whom were white counter parts and some African American counter parts they, first day of class, had the written assignments ready. First day of class, they had whatever materials they kind of needed. So from a socio-economic perspective the reason I
did not have those things is because I did not have the resources to make it comfortable for me to be able to have the writing ready. I did not have a good lap top.

**Personal Factors as a component- internal facilitator visualization.**

Victor said that visualization helped him during his doctoral process. Victor said that he would visualize himself at graduation, and those visions would keep him on track. Victor would even visualize himself wearing his cap and gown, which to him is a true symbol of doctoral completion:

I’m fairly certain that I mentioned this to you before, the graduation ceremony was one of the visualizations that I would use to get me back on track. I mean I would literally picture myself at graduation. Being called with the regalia on and getting some piece of paper that, the symbol of the degree. So yeah, the visualization of the ceremony for sure was a motivation for me. Even the cap and gown was something that I would visualize in my head in progress and it’s interesting because I wanted to buy, for the graduation, the good cap and gown, but it was just too much money, so I settled for the cheaper version of the doctoral gown. But if I had extra money, if I had money to fool around with, I would have definitely gotten that cap and gown that marks the attainment of the degree you know. I thought it was a real, true, symbol of completion.

**Social role component- role barriers adult learner and son.**

One especially painful barrier that Victor experienced while working on his doctorate was the death of his mother in 1995, the year that Victor started his doctoral
program. He relayed that he started the program fairly strong and when his mother passed away he had to stop out for a while because he did not have the energy to continue. Victor explained the consequences of this incident by stating:

I started fairly strong and when that happened I had to kind of drop out for a little while because I just didn’t have the energy. I did not have the focus and all that other stuff…My first ever incomplete. I had never gotten an incomplete in a course in all of the years of college that I had. But in ’95 when I started my doctorate, um, that happened and I couldn’t even finish the course so I got my first incomplete and that meant that already I was trying to catch up. And you don’t want to start a doctorate with a need to catch up. So that’s when it became a little more problematic for me.

Victor said that the death of his mother was devastating to him, and coming from a Puerto Rican family made the moment heavier.

For me it was that period, the 1995 period, when my mother died. And you know most Puerto Rican families. I don’t want to limited it to Puerto Rican families, because I think it is pretty ubiquitous. I think that it’s more than just a cultural thing, but for us, and for me, that was a heavy moment. So that was a challenge. That was struggle. And it made me question what I was going through and I just couldn’t focus anymore. I mean it was tough.

Social role component- role facilitators religious affiliate.

One of the things that gave Victor strength was his spirituality. Victor said that he comes from a religious family, so he gained strength from things that connected him
spiritually. Victor said that during his doctoral process, he attended church and prayed on a regular basis.

* Cultural component facilitators. *

* Food, Music, and Games. *

Victor said that after he started working on his doctorate, he was not able to attend family gatherings as much as he used to, but he still made time to attend some events. He indicated that when he went to family gatherings he would enjoy Puerto Rican food like rice and beans, pork, and turkey. Family gatherings gave Victor an opportunity to communicate in Spanglish, a term that Puerto Ricans use to describe the mixture of English and Spanish while conversing. Victor and his family listened Puerto Rican music together. The family would also play traditional Puerto Rican games such as dominoes. Victor spoke to me of the importance of game playing to the cohesiveness of his family:

The other cultural thing that made a difference then and still today is games. Our family was big on games. My father was a big domino player. So all of us, no not all of us, most of the guys in the family, I would say, learned dominoes, and so we were playing all of the time. And I would play my brother, I would play my sister, I'd play my sister-in-law and we would all get together and have these championships. When my parents both passed away that legacy was left on. Some of us, still play a little bit, but the next generation, the children of my, our children and the children of my brothers and sisters they now, they also play a little bit of dominoes but they picked up other game playing, trivial pursuit, Pictionary, we
invented our own games, those kind of things were the kind of things that we would do culturally to keep us together, and still do.

**Cultural component - barrier.**

**No Latino role model.**

Victor said that ethnicity played a role for him because there were few Latinos in his doctoral program. He relayed that he was one of maybe two or three Latino students. There were also no Latino faculty teaching his doctoral courses. Victor’s dissertation committee consisted of three white men. All of these factors may have contributed to Victor’s feeling that his dissertation committee was “testing” him, and that they were playing the role of gate keeper to his doctoral degree. Victor also indicated that gender may have played a role. Victor said:

I was being tested. I felt as if I was having to put on some high level performance for these three white men so its hits on ethnicity and it also hits on gender. I’m also a man, so I don’t know if things would have worked out differently if I were a white female. I don’t know if the process would have gone faster. I don’t know if some of my writings would have been scrutinized differently because I think that sometimes those things do play a role in as much as one believes that the process is an objective process. People do control turf. And so, this is turf area.

**Catastrophic social event: 9-11**

Victor said that another struggle that he encountered during his doctoral process was related to the events that occurred on September 11, 2001 (9-11). Not only did Victor
have to deal with his own feelings about the incident, as an OPENGATE counselor, Victor was also responsible for counseling his students. In Victor’s words:

I was still in process and I was really close to finishing and next thing you know we had the world trade center crashing. I work four or five blocks from the world trade center. This college closed for about a month. It was a temporary morgue. Meaning that there were some dead bodies in this facility because that’s how close we are. So that period also uh, held me up a little bit because I have to do my work as a professional counselor in this institution but I’m also in dissertation and now we have people experiencing trauma at high levels, and my own trauma associated with the occurrence.

According to an article that I found, BMCC is the largest community college in the Gotham system, which consists of two locations: the main campus is located at 199 Chambers Street and second location, the 15 story Lexington Hall, is located three blocks away at 30 West Broadway. The writer of the article was a BMCC library administrator who was at work on September 11, 2001. She was on the telephone with an employee when she made the following observation:

Thick smoke billowed out as word quickly got around that a plane had crashed into the Trade Center. Back inside, most of my staff and some students had gone to the southern end of my library, where we had a direct view of the towers. As sirens from emergency vehicles erupted everywhere, we began to see debris, shrapnel, and later, victims, falling from the inferno. People were stunned…Soon after, even as I tried to turn the gathering crowd away from the windows, the
second plane hit the South Tower. It was then clear that we were under a terrorist attack.

On that day, sometime after 10:00 a.m., the World Trade Center towers came down one after another. In the afternoon, the 7 World Trade Center caught fire and eventually fell, clipping away part of the Lexington Building. So far, BMCC has spent $65 million in renovations to Lexington Hall, which has yet to open to this day. After the attack, the college’s primary focus was on the students and the staff; administrators established a hotline and arranged for counseling services to be provided over the phone. Because of BMCC’s proximity to the Trade Center, the college became a command center for firemen and the Port Authority Police. On a macro level, the attack to the World Trade Center was devastating the United States, the state of New York, and on a micro level, equally as devastating to the staff and students at BMCC. Six BMCC students perished in the attack, with two of them being firefighters. The main campus where Victor works also closed down for three weeks. Therefore, it is understandable that this catastrophic event served as a profound barrier slowing Victor’s eventual doctoral success.

*Social component- facilitators.*

*Faculty status privilege.*

Victor said that it was helpful to his doctoral process to be working in a faculty position at the time. He indicated that being a BMCC faulty member afforded him a flexible work schedule. Victor did not have to experience the pressure associated with a 9 to 5 type of position, so being in academia during the process was definitely beneficial.
Peer Network.

Victor indicated that his colleagues attending the doctoral program with him offered him social support. Victor found it comforting that his colleagues were dealing with similar issues, like struggling with chapters four and five, because the doctoral process is a lonely road. Victor said, “It’s you and the books and the paper and your sample, so, it can be a little lonely.” Victor relayed that knowing that other people were going through the same process gave him solace.

Victor’s survival tactics.

Victor said that he tried to do his best to remain balanced during his doctoral process. He indicated that he did not want to immerse himself to the point that all he was doing was working on projects for school. Victor still wanted to play ball, go to the gym have a social life, and do his dissertation at the same time, which served as a challenge. Victor said he loved to play paddle ball at Orchard Beach, which is a bay located in the Bronx. He conveyed that he would go there to play ball, but he also enjoyed pulling out a chair, sitting and enjoying the natural environment. This activity reenergized Victor. Victor described:

Those Sundays that I was telling you about, that was my paddle ball day, cause I love playing ball. It’s almost an addiction sometimes. So you have to be outside particularly in the summer time. You know, so, I did try to make sure that I stayed somewhat balanced so that I would not look like the crazy guy, trying to finish his doctorate and I think that helped a little bit, but it was a challenge because I think
if I had, if I were looking back, I probably would have been able to finish sooner than I did, but I chose to live life a little more fuller.

Victor explained that he made sure to take care of himself physically while he was working on his doctorate. While writing his dissertation, he made sure to do 30 to 45 minutes of cardio and weight training per day. Victor said that he purchased an elliptical machine and he would stop thinking about the content of his dissertation as he was working out and then he would visualize himself graduating. Victor said, “I would start seeing myself walk to the center of the auditorium getting a doctoral degree and that visualization would just give me strength.” Victor would use that strength to keep him focused on his doctoral goals.

Victor said he would still go to family gatherings while he was working on his doctorate, just not as much. He indicated that those social experiences gave him the energy that eventually led to his doctoral success. Victor relayed:

I would go out for dinners with family and things like that but not as much as I do today. So those social experiences had to do with, again, you kind of get energy from people who love you and you get energy from people who are positive and you get energy from people who care about you, so, those social experiences, and they were not an inordinate amount, but when we would finally get together it would make a difference, so you know. The Christmas times, the Thanksgiving periods, those things meant a lot to me because you get different kind of energy from that, so.
Another thing that was helpful to Victor’s doctoral work was his love of music. Victor explicated:

I think that we live in a culture that embraces music and it’s a part of our development. You know, you grow up, you go to clubs, you take the train to work, you put on the headphones. So, there is something involved with music and one’s ability to get through the day. So for me at points, I just have to put music on to get my bearings again and then move on.

Victor said that the lyrics to songs inspired him and kept him going. Victor said that some songs that he enjoyed had to do with things getting in your way, or blocking you. Sometimes the songs were about people who were hurting you, but then the songs would twist the situation into something positive, and that gave Victor courage. He found the song performed by Celine Dion during the Olympics called The Power of a Dream especially inspiring. Victor particularly liked the lyric, “It’s the moment that you think you can’t, you discover that you can.”

Victor’s Advice for others.

Victor offered several bits of advised to other Puerto Ricans who may be interested in pursuing a doctorate, or who are going through the process of it now. Victor said you need to be persistent and have patients because the doctoral process is not as difficult as it is long. Victor said:

It’s for me a challenge and I think that’s the hardest part about education is that getting a degree is not so difficult, it’s that it’s time consuming and the stretch is
not 6 months from now it’s four years, five years, seven years, whatever period of time. So it’s a lot of years- that is the challenge.

Victor said that the process is otherwise doable. Victor added, “You just need to make the decision that this is something that you want and go ahead and do it and get it done.” Victor said that once in the dissertation writing phase, the rule of thumb is write something every day. Victor explained his dissertation writing process:

The process for me in a dissertation endeavor is write, rewrite, write, rewrite, revise, write, rewrite, revise, that iteration, those iterations, that could eat you up a little bit. So just keep doing it. Somebody told me one time and I said this to you before, write a little bit each day, or rewrite a little bit each day, so if you don’t have two hours in the day to give it, give a half hour.

Victor also said that you have to also be prepared to defend and justify the contents of your dissertation. Victor advised:

Don’t back down. There are sometimes when people are going to challenge your authority. On another day question your methodology, question your hypothesis, question your results, question your literature review, question your format and style, APA vs. whatever people are using. Backup your position.

I asked Victor how the number of Puerto Ricans who earn doctorates can be increased and he said through exposure that it could be done. Victor said:

What you’re doing now [referring to my study] for me is significant, the only problem that I have is that few people that are pursuing even an associate degree are ever going to look at a dissertation. I mean most of us, unless we are engaged
in literature reviews, and we don’t engage in literature reviews much, unless we are in graduate level work. Seeing this kind of stuff, what you’re doing makes a difference. I think that people need to be exposed to the idea it is doable. That is can be completed, that you can apply for grad school, get into a doctoral program and see it full-through. They just need to be exposed to the idea that it can be done.

Victor indicated that the message that the doctorate is attainable needs to be delivered to Puerto Ricans, but the message needs to be delivered where Puerto Rican are. Victor suggested that a good place to start is at the community college level since approximately 55% of Latinos start at that level.

Victor said that another issue that needs to be addressed is the appearance that society does not value education. He indicated that people should be paid commensurate with their level of education. Victor pointed out:

If you put a Master level requirement behind a position, you should pay that person a salary that is worthy of somebody with a Master’s Degree. And we live in a society where even currently we are talking about budget cuts. We are talking about cutting the salaries of, or stopping the salary gains from teachers. Teachers who have Master’s Degrees, who work with children to try to educate them, they’re talking about holding back those salaries. That to me, there is little value associated with people who have degrees. So that if you valued, if we put money behind what we say is important then more people would want it. A lot of our younger people are seeing American Idol, people getting famous because they
have a talent, sports, this is where the money is. Well when are we going to show
the picture that there is money in something that we do that requires education?
That is a societal problem. That doesn’t have anything to do with anything Latino.
That has to do with this country not putting enough money behind positions that
require this level of education.

Victor said that in order to attract our youth to pursue advanced levels of education, more
incentives need to be offered. Victor suggested that life for this next generation of youth
may be too easy. Victor pointed out:

Sometimes I think we made it too easy. One of my motivations to finish school
was, I did not want to be poor. My father and my mother they struggled like hell. I
did not want to struggle like them. I don’t know. Like we were talking before, I
don’t have the kind of job, if I don’t feel like coming in, I just don’t come in and
nothing is going to happen. I call in. I’m not coming in. I don’t even say why.

Right. I have tenure. If something happens, they really have to keep me on unless
something horrible happens. So I feel really secure in my position. I have a
beautiful office. Not a whole lot of people in my family can say that. So there are
incentives involved, but I don’t know what else one can do. You encourage, you
inform, you let them know we are using technology, websites, I don’t know
Twitter and Facebook. You try to put these things down and show that it is
important for them to do. I don’t know what else that we can do, uh, incentives.
We can put more incentives.
Lastly, Victor said that we need to offer scholarships so that Latinos can be encouraged to pursue college degrees. Victor said that there are some scholarships available but there needs to be more exposure about the resources that are available because finances are an issue.

**Summary: Victor.**

Victor encountered a barrier related to personal factors. Because there was a lack of representation of Latino students and faculty, Victor felt that his three white committee members were especially critical of his dissertation. Victor felt that they were questioning Victor’s ability to complete his doctoral studies, which in turn made Victor question his own abilities. One facilitator related to personal factors that Victor used to help get him through the doctoral process was visualization. While Victor exercised, he would visualize himself graduating and he would visualize himself wearing his doctoral robes. One extremely painful barrier that Victor faced was the death of his mother during his first semester as a doctoral student. This caused him to stop out of his doctoral program because he became too unmotivated and unfocused to continue. A social role factor that helped Victor move forward was his spirituality. Victor attended church and prayed on a regular basis. An enjoyable cultural facilitator that Victor experienced while working on his doctorate included attending family gatherings where he would reenergize by enjoying Puerto Rican food, music, and traditional games. Again, a cultural barrier that Victor experienced was the lack of Latino faculty and student representation in his program. Victor said that he was one of maybe three Latino students, and he had no Latino professors that taught him.
As far as social factors, one thing that was helpful was the fact that Victor was working as an OPENGATE counselor while he pursued his doctorate. This afforded him a flexible schedule and alleviated him of the pressures of having a 9-5 job. Another social facilitator that Victor experienced was the support from peers that were attending doctoral courses with him. Finally, a social barrier that Victor experienced was the September 11, 2001 (9-11) incident, which caused him to delay completing his doctoral degree. Victor said that BMCC is located only a few blocks from where 9-11 took place. Not only did Victor have to deal with his own trauma over the event, he had to help his students in his capacity as an OPENGATE counselor at BMCC.

**After the Interviews: Bracketing my feelings about Victor.**

After two interviews with Victor I had positive feelings for him as a person and as a researcher. I respected that he was able to discern between his feelings toward his committee now as oppose to when he experienced their harsh scrutiny about his dissertation. In Victor’s case, the time lapse between his experience and his reflection of his experience may have helped him to draw a more clear assessment of his committee member’s intentions toward him, and his own sense insecurity about his abilities.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the interview settings, which were a series GOTHAM colleges and one private residence located Harlem, New York. I provided descriptions of the eight participants who were all affiliated with GOTHAM in some way. I then provided detailed accounts of the data that I collected from the participants after two formal face-to-face interviews with each one. Based on my analysis of the data, I identified numerous emergent subthemes that I coalesced into major themes. I triangulated the major themes with other data sources, which combined have produced a phenomenological description of the lived experience of each participant’s doctoral experience. I provided a summary of the participants’ experiences with the doctoral process by illustrating the components of their experiences based on the variables that influenced their perceptions. During the course of presenting the data, I provided a
transparent account of my phenomenological analysis of the data by disclosing my interview process and experiences, and by bracketing my feelings about the participants, the data that they provided me with, and the interview setting.

In the next chapter, I will present a cross-case analysis of the data provide to me by my eight participants including a description of the similarities and dissimilarities of the participants’ lived doctoral experiences. In order to add to the usefulness of this study, I will also coalesce the advice the participants offered to other Latinos interested in pursuing doctoral studies, along with the suggestions that they provided about how to increase the representation of Latino doctorates.
Chapter Five: Analysis, Implications, and Conclusion

Introduction

This study described and explained the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education by exploring those social and cultural factors that influenced their perceptions, and served as educational facilitators or obstacles to their doctoral attainment. This study also examined how this group of doctoral graduates perceived their social role demands, and how they prioritized these responsibilities as they pursued their doctorate.

The questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the components of their perspectives?
2. What social-cultural variables influenced their perspectives?

I was inspired to conduct this study because based on my review of the literature, Latinos lag behind Whites and Blacks in college degree attainment and this educational disparity concerned me. Latinos are currently the largest minority group in the United States, and the Latino population is expected to increase exponentially in the future. I believe that college degree attainment for Latinos is imperative because statistics show an undeniable relationship between degree attainment and income level. Therefore, in order to ensure the economic wellbeing of Latinos, it is important that Latinos persist through
college degree programs. This is especially true for Puerto Ricans because they are the second largest Latino subgroup.

The majority of college persistence and departure literature that I reviewed applied to students in general and some of the studies focused on Latino College students. However, fewer studies explore the perspectives of Latinos with the process of graduate or doctoral degree attainment. This is especially true of Latinos of specific ethnic backgrounds such as Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican. I conducted this study in order to address this gap in the literature.

In chapter 3, I explained that this would be qualitative study that would employ a phenomenological research approach in order to describe the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates about their experiences during the doctoral process. I indicated that I chose this design because doing so would allow me to capture the participants’ stories during the interview process, a method common in qualitative research designs.

Based on my literature review, I knew that only 1.5% of the overall population had earned a doctorate, and only 5% of those degrees have been earned by Latinos. Hence, I anticipated that finding a sample of individuals to interview for this study would be a challenge. After searching for several months without success, I contacted one of the individuals who agreed to participate in this study, who put me in touch with other potential research participants. With the help of this participant, who helped to make this study possible, I was able to locate a purposive, snowball sample of nine participants who agreed to be interviewed for this study. One individual dropped out of the study on the day I was scheduled to interview him, which left me with a total of eight participants.
I explained in detail in chapters 3 and 4 that the eight individuals who participated in this study were affiliated with the GOTHAM education system in some way. Therefore, it made sense to me to delimit the participant pool to GOTHAM current or former faculty, and I excluded the individual that I interviewed for the pilot study from the final analysis (a Puerto Rican doctoral graduate from Florida).

Throughout this study, I have been transparent about my data collection methods and methods of analysis. As far as my data collection methods, I described how I traveled to New York for a week both in February and March 2010 in order to conduct a total of two formal, face-to-face recorded interviews with each participant. I also explained that as part of the phenomenological method employed in this study, I analyzed the participants’ transcripts using a software program called Atlas-Ti. The results of the analysis revealed four emergent major themes that I determined to be the components of the participants’ lived experience with attaining a doctorate. I explained that I developed the major themes by identifying subthemes from the excerpts of the participants’ transcripts. The subthemes were coalesced into the major themes, which were factored as either barriers or facilitators to the participants’ doctoral experience. For the sake of clarity, I referred to the major themes as the components of the participants’ lived experience with the doctoral process, and the subcategories as the variables that influenced those components. I also indicated that the variables could be factored or categorized as barriers of facilitators.
I explained how I formed the components and what data the reader could be expected to be coalesced into those categories. As a refresher, the rationale for the categories that I developed is provided here.

1. The *Personal Factors as a Component* is a broad category that I developed, which includes those barriers or facilitators related internally or externally to the participants’ self or person (mind or body). Internal factors would include barriers or facilitators to the participants’ doctoral experience based on what the individual felt or what they thought about the related experience. External factors would be those barriers or facilitators related to the participants life circumstance that had an impact on their doctoral experience.

2. The *Social Role Factors as a Component* category was developed to include those barriers or facilitators to the participants’ doctoral experience based on the interaction between their social role responsibilities while they worked on their doctorate. The social roles that pertained to the participants of this study included the roles of *adult learner, worker, parent, son/daughter, sibling, spouse/significant other, friend and religious affiliate.*

3. The *Cultural Factors as a Component* category was created to include those barriers or facilitators to the participants’ doctoral process that the participants witnessed or experienced because of ethnicity or race, but that were not related to personal factors.

4. The *Social Factors as a Component* category was created to include those barriers or facilitators to the participants’ doctoral experience that was related to social
events, peers, faculty, or the educational institutions that the participants either worked for or attended school at that were not related to personal factors, social roles or cultural factors.

In chapter 4, I summarized the participants’ lived doctoral experience by providing a basic demographic profile of each participant, followed by a more detailed description of them. In order to add transparency and verisimilitude to my data collection process, I provided the reader with a detailed description of my experiences interacting within the research environment, leading up to my interview with each of the participants. I detailed the component parts of the participants’ doctoral experiences, and then explained how I bracketed my feelings about the participants in order to more clearly analyze the research data. To add to the usefulness of the study, I shared with the reader those tactics that the participants employed that led them to doctoral success. In order to encourage the representation of Latinos with doctorates, I provided the participants’ advice to future or current Latino doctoral students, and the participants’ suggestions to faculty and administrators of educational institutions.

In this chapter I will discuss issues related to the verification process I employed and the transferability of the findings. I will provide responses to the exploratory research questions, along with a model of the study. Finally I will discuss the implications of the study to future Latino doctorates, to faculty and institutions of higher learning, and I will make recommendations for future research.
Data Credibility, Transferability, and Consistency

In chapters three and four, I explained how I identified the emergent major themes and subthemes that I confirmed to be the components of the lived experiences of the participants’ with doctoral attainment. In order to verify that my findings were accurate, I employed a number of steps to ensure internal validity of the data, which included a series of member checks, triangulation of the data, the process of peer review, and clarification of my biases and assumptions before and during the data collection and analysis process.

The first step that I employed was a series of member checks that were conducted via e-mail. I e-mailed the participants copies of their transcripts and audio files after each interview for their verification. I also gave the participants the option to receive the copies via U.S. mail, which nobody requested. I receive corrections back from several participants.

Once I developed the participants’ profiles, I e-mailed each of them a copy for their verification. I received two back with a minor corrections. I e-mailed the participants copies of my codes, the excerpts taken from their transcripts that I coded, and I explained the coding and subtheme grouping process. I received no corrections or objections to the process.

The second step that I employed was the data triangulation process. During this process, I corroborated the participants’ stories with outside evidence derived from books and articles lending credibility of the participants’ accounts. I found supporting evidence, but none that was contradictory. Employing this method gave me a more holistic
understanding of the participants’ doctoral experiences because during the process, I took their stories apart, and examined the issues raised separately. I identified those issues appropriate for cross validation. After this validation process, I provided the reader with a fortified interpretation of the participants’ story.

In sum, this validation process allowed me to deliver an interpretation of the participants’ stories with verisimilitude. For instance, by cross validating Graciella and Angelica’s data with the book that they wrote about their formative educational experiences, I was able to engage myself and the reader in a broader context of the barriers that they overcame in order to achieve doctoral success. By cross validating Lissette’s interview data with the book that she wrote based on her dissertation, I was able to more profoundly understand and explain her motives for pursuing her dissertation topic. I was better able to understand Hector’s attitude toward his doctoral experiences and able to bracket my feelings about Hector’s responses by cross validating the content of his interviews with information about two individuals that Hector admires: Julian B. Rotter and Albert Ellis. Cross validating Marisol’s experiences with academic tracking against the information that I found about the topic in a book titled *Puerto Ricans Born in the U.S.A.*, by Clara E. Rodriguez, added more credibility to my account of her amazing story. I was able to cross validate Miguel’ negative experiences with the lack of institutional fit with research that I found during the process of conducting the literature review for this study. Tinto (1985 & 1997), Bean (2005), and Noel (1985) have written a great deal about the importance of institutional fit to the academic persistence of college students. Their writings gave certitude to Miguel’s story. I was able to cross validate
some of Yvette’s issues regarding GOTHAM’s graduate school admissions process against articles that I found concerning GOTHAM’s historical struggle with open admissions, tuition increases, and standardized testing, which some feel has served to deny equal educational access to Black and Latino undergraduate students. Finally, I was able to find articles related to the impact of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in New York at the BMCC campus, which added vividness to my writing of Victor’s story. I have provided a list of the issues that I triangulated and the documents I used for the cross validation process in Appendix N.

In addition, I also validated the emergent themes of this study via the process of peer review. During this process, I asked three peer reviewers to review the transcripts of two or three of the participants. I e-mailed each of the reviewers a written set of instructions, a list of 34 codes that represented potential subthemes, a list of code descriptions, and a copy of the entire transcript belonging to the participant so the reviewer could review the data in context. The reviewers were given a copy of the excerpts extracted from the participants’ transcripts and asked to code them. I instructed the reviewers to use the codes provided or create their own codes as they deemed appropriate. Based on the reviewers’ responses and my own iterations of review, the coded data were used to identify the emergent subthemes that later evolved into the study’s emergent major themes.

In order to establish transferability of the data, I conducted a cross case analysis, which I will share with the reader later in this section. I also provided a detailed account of each of the participants’ stories, which has provided the reader with a base of
information to relate to or to form a judgment. I have established the reliability of the data by providing the reader with a transparent account of my data collection process, both in my narration of my interaction within the data collection environment and in the form of an audit trail that I have provided for the reader’s review in Appendix M. I have also outlined in great detail my methods for data triangulation and data analysis, which have also served to add to the reliability of the data and findings of this study.

**Response to Research Question One: Analysis of Components.**

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education by interviewing a purposive group of individuals that met this criterion. The questions that guided the study were: ‘What are the components of their perspectives?’ and ‘What social and cultural variables influence their perspectives?’ In short, based on the eight participants’ interview data, the components of their perspectives included Personal Factors, Social Role Factors, Cultural Factors, and Social Factors. In this section, I will provide a comprehensive answer to this first research question by conducting a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences within the components of the participants’ experiences.

**Personal Factors as a Component.**

*Personal Factors as a Component* is a broad category that I developed, which includes those barriers or facilitators related internally or externally to the participants’ self or person.
Internal/external barriers.

The most common barrier reported by all of the participants for this component was the external barrier related to having a lack of finances. All but two of the participants reported having financial difficulties while they were going through the doctoral process. Lissette, Marisol, and Miguel were fellowship recipients who lost funding while they were writing their dissertations. Losing funding meant that Lissette had to get a job to support herself and her doctoral endeavors, which meant that she had to divide her time between being a doctoral student and a worker. Miguel also had to gain employment when his fellowship ran out, which meant that Miguel had to stop collecting data for his dissertation. This caused Miguel’s dissertation process to be extended. Marisol had the difficult choice between continuing to receive funding from her fellowship or working at Prospect College, and Marisol chose to work. Graciella had to pay for child care and a host of other expenses to help support her family with her fellowship money, and Yvette and Victor paid for their courses out-of-pocket.

Of the internal barriers related to the Personal Factors component, the most commonly reported was related to self-efficacy. Graciella, Angelica, Miguel, and Victor all reported being unsure of their abilities base on their ethnicity. They all reported feeling as if they did not belong. Graciella and Angelica stated that this feeling dissipated after the received high grades their first semester, which gave them confidence that they could succeed. Miguel indicated that his sense of insecurity about his abilities persisted throughout his doctoral process because he was haunted by being a benefactor of affirmative action. Miguel always questioned whether affirmative action was the only
reason that he was accepted to Ivy University. Victor admitted that his sense of self-doubt may have emanated from his own perceptions, because his dissertation committee was composed of all white males. Victor said he wasn’t sure if his committee was questioning if “this Puerto Rican could handle this level of work,” or if Victor merely doubted himself.

Other internal barriers reported included, fear of rejection because of being pregnant. Angelica and Graciella were both pregnant as they were going through the doctoral admission process, and both thought that being pregnant would prevent their acceptance. Angelica also reported that fear of “not being good enough” was a constant barrier that she struggled with both personally and educationally. She also reported that her reaction to losing the baby she was pregnant with when she was initially admitted to her doctoral program was a barrier that she managed to turn around into something positive. Angelica said that she used school to bury her feelings about the loss, and she ended up doing well academically. Graciella reported that having a negative attitude about standardized testing served as a deterrent to applying to a doctoral program. Graciella explained that she did not feel like “jumping through hoops,” but the opportunity “fell in her lap,” so she applied anyhow. Lastly, Hector reported that procrastination was his most notable barrier during his doctoral process, which caused him to delay completion for years.

**Internal/external facilitators.**

The most common external facilitator reported was financial aid. Most of the participants reported that receiving financial aid, in the form of fellowships or scholarships, made their doctoral education possible. As previously stated, Graciella,
Angelica, Lissette, Marisol, and Miguel were all recipients of fellowships. The second most common facilitator (internal) was the drive to succeed, as was reported by Graciella and Angelica. Other internal facilitators that were reported included interest in their dissertation topic. Lissette reported that her dissertation was a continuation of her master’s thesis topic, in which she had an innate interest. Where four of the participants reported having negative experiences related to their lack of self-efficacy, Yvette’s high level of self-efficacy was based on her clear sense of identity being a black Puerto Rican woman. In addition, Victor reported that his ability to visualize himself at his graduation ceremony wearing doctoral robes provide him motivation to succeed.

Table 8.

Personal Factors as Component: Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>Graciella</th>
<th>Angelica</th>
<th>Lissette</th>
<th>Hector</th>
<th>Marisol</th>
<th>Miguel</th>
<th>Yvette</th>
<th>Victor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Rejection: Pregnant</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Negative Attitude: Standardized Tests</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Reaction: Lost Child</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear: Not Good Enough</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procrastination</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Finances</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social role factors as a component.

The Social Role Factors as a Component category was developed to include doctoral experiences that the participants had because of the interaction between the obligations associated with being a student and other social role responsibilities. The social roles that pertained to the participants of this study included the roles of Adult Learner, Worker, Parent, Son/Daughter, Sibling, Spouse/Significant Other, Friend and Religious Affiliate.

Social Role Barriers.

All of the individuals interviewed for this study participated in the role of Adult Learner while earning their doctorate. The most common social role barrier reported was the interaction of the social roles of Worker and Adult Learner (or doctoral student). All of the participants worked either full or part-time at some point while working on their doctorate. All but two reported having difficulty in either balancing their time or focusing their priorities. The second most common social role barrier was the role of Spouse with being a doctoral student. In fact, Angelica and Marisol reported this social role as a barrier and said that they eventually divorced. Miguel reported that breaking up with his
significant other was such a detrimental barrier that his doctoral process was delayed because he became depressed over the failed relationship. The third most common social role barrier reported was the son/daughter role. Three of the participants experienced the death of their mother while working on their doctorates. Victor reported being so devastated by this loss that he stopped out of his program for a semester. Angelica and Graciella both experienced a great deal of stress because their mother required full-time care prior to her death. Angelica and Graciella also reported feeling a great deal of guilt because they did not celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas prior to their mother’s passing. Miguel reported that although he is the son of educated parents, they were educated in Spain and Puerto Rico, which meant that they could not assist Miguel with navigating the American educational system. Miguel reported “being on his own.”

Similarly, Marisol reported that being the daughter of a mother who had a six grade education was difficult because her mother could not assist her financially with school. Finally, three individuals reported that being a parent and being a doctoral student caused them to have to make difficult choices. Where Hector chose to procrastinate, Angelica and Graciella stayed focused by paying babysitters, or having their spouses take care of their children while they were at school. Graciella and Angelica reported the most dramatic stories with having to juggle the roles of being an Adult Learner, Wife, Parent and Daughter. This may be because they both had young children and a terminally ill parent as they were simultaneously pursuing their doctorates.
Social role facilitators.

It is interesting to note that some participants reported the same social role to be both a barrier and a facilitator. For instance, all of the participants reported that the interaction of being an Adult Learner with some other social role resulted in a negative experience. However, in Angelica’s case, she specifically stated that being a perpetually Adult Learner has served as a beacon for her. Angelica simply loves to learn and she manages to take something positive from every educational experience. Angelica also reported that being her father’s daughter was positive because he imparted her with a strong work ethic, and he was also a cultured well-read man. Angelica said that her mother was a very giving woman when she was well. However, Angelica’s mother also instilled a lot of guilt in her, because Angelica’s mother could not understand why she wanted to go to school rather than being a mother. Angelica reported that her husband was a barrier to her doctoral process because she had to juggle her marriage with her other responsibilities; however, Angelica’s husband also cared for her child while she was at school. Miguel reported that his parents served as both barrier and facilitator to his doctoral process. On one hand, Miguel’s parents were well educated and had high expectations of him. However, they were educated in another country, so they were limited in their ability to help Miguel with the America educational system.

There was a five way tie between the most commonly reported social role facilitators, which were being a Son/Daughter (the participants’ parents were a facilitator), the role of Friend, the role of being a Sibling, and the role of being a Religious or Spiritual Affiliate. Three of the participants said that their parents were
facilitators of their doctoral experience (Angelica and Miguel’s account have been discussed). Lissette said that her mother was absolutely indispensable to her doctoral success because she has always provided Lissette with unconditional support all of her life. Three participants said that at least one friend facilitated their doctoral experience. Lissette relayed that it was her friend Lauda that gave her the idea for the army fatigue exercise that helped Lissette finish her dissertation. Miguel said that his community of friends at school helped him a great deal when he could not get assistance from his professors, and Yvette said that going out dancing with her friends helped her to be in a relaxed mood to deal with full-time work and school during the middle of the week.

Three participants said that their siblings were instrumental to their doctoral success. Angelica and Graciella are sisters who pursued their doctoral degrees together. They had a symbiotic relationship through the process because Angelica helped organize Graciella, and Graciella kept Angelica moving. These two very special individuals helped each other succeed despite the death of their mother, and the raising of their children during sickness and health. Miguel also indicated that he is very close to his sister and that his relationship with her helped him through his doctoral process.

Three participants indicated that being a Religious Affiliate or spiritual being contributed to their doctoral success. Angelica indicated that she was being spiritually guided to complete her doctorate. Yvette said that she had a group of women called prayer warriors that prayed for her during her dissertation defense. Yvette said that she could feel their presence spiritually as she was making her presentation during her
doctoral defense. Victor said that he would go to church and pray on a regular basis and that his sense of faith helped him through his doctoral process.

Three individuals indicated that their spouses were facilitators to their doctoral experiences (Angelica and Graciella have been discussed). Lissette indicated that her husband was helpful to her data collection experience because the hip-hop world was a male dominated space. One issue that Lissette encountered was the sexual advances that were made toward her by her male interviewees. Once Lissette started to bring her husband to her interviews or hip-hop venues, the sexual advances ceased and luckily, her interviewees were still willing to talk to her. The last social role facilitator mentioned was the role of parent. Yvette said that while she was going through the doctoral process, she was raising an adult son who became a New York Police Officer. Her son was instrumental in helping her collect data for her dissertation because of his work status.

The Cultural Factors as a Component category was created to include those doctoral experiences the participants had related to race or ethnicity (but not related to personal factors).

Cultural Factors as a Component.

Cultural barriers.

There were two barriers that tied for the most frequently reported cultural barrier. The first was No Latino Role Models. Both Graciella and Angelica reported that other than the Latino cohort that they were admitted with, there were no other Latino students at their doctoral institution, nor were there any Latino professors. Marisol, Miguel, and Victor reported the same.
Table 10. Social Roles as Component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Graciella</th>
<th>Angelica</th>
<th>Lissette</th>
<th>Hector</th>
<th>Marisol</th>
<th>Miguel</th>
<th>Yvette</th>
<th>Victor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Learner</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Son/Daughter</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Spouse/Significant Other</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second was Negative Event by Ethnicity. Graciella, Angelica, Marisol, Miguel, and Yvette all reported some negative event that they experienced or witnessed because they were Latino or that was derogatory toward Latinos. Yvette reported the most egregious incidents of racism outwardly committed by faculty in her doctoral program. Miguel witnessed unfair affirmative action practices at his doctoral institution. Marisol was nearly academically tracked into a secretarial program when she was in high school, despite her academic achievements, which almost derailed her doctoral path. Graciella and Angelica overheard faculty making derogatory remarks about the abilities of Latinos at their doctoral institution. Graciella expressly heard one faculty member refer to the Latino cohort as “those students who would not normally make it.” Latino
Gender Role was also listed as a cultural barrier. Both Angelica and Graciella reported
being conditioned to believe that a Puerto Rican women’s primary role was to be a wife
and mother and that advanced academic achievement was something that Puerto Rican
women did not do.

*Cultural facilitators.*

Where the lack of Latino Role Models was the most frequently reported cultural
barrier, the most frequently reported cultural facilitator was having access to a Latino
Community. Lissette, Marisol, and Miguel all said that being able to meet with or live
around other Latinos made them feel that they had people that they could relate to and
made them feel less isolated. There were three cultural facilitators that were the second
most reported facilitators. They were having a Latino Cohort, having a Latino Role
Model and enjoying Puerto Rican Food, Games, and Music. Graciella and Angelica said
that it was greatly beneficial to them to have attended doctoral studies with a cohort of
other Latinos that they could relate to and share cultural ties with. Graciella and Angelica
said that everyone in the cohort were very supportive of one another. Both Lissette and
Yvette indicated that they found it indispensable to have a Latino Role Model(s).
Lissette’s Latino role model was her dissertation chair, Juan Flores, who inspired her
interest in both her Master’s and dissertation topic (one was the continuation of the
other). Yvette said that she was taught by two Puerto Rican women professors in her
Master’s program who served as Latino role models to her. One of those professors was
instrumental in helping Yvette to get accepted to the Social Work Doctoral program at
Hunter. Both Lissette and Victor indicated that being able to enjoy Latino music served
as a much needed respite from their doctoral studies. In fact, Lissette is now a budding music artist who is soon to release her first music album. Her singing career started as something she would do as a break from rap music. Victor reported that while he was working on his doctorate he enjoyed visiting with family, where he would enjoy listening to Puerto Rican music, eating Puerto Rican food, and playing traditional Puerto Rican games such as dominoes. Victor said that after he started his doctoral program, he was not able to make these visits as often, but they served to motivate him when he was able. Other cultural facilitators that were mentioned included Ethnicity as a facilitator, service to Puerto Ricans, and Becoming Role Model. Where a number of participants reported ethnicity as being a barrier to their doctoral studies, Lissette reported that ethnicity served as a facilitator for her. This is because Lissette researched a Latino related topic, that is, the role of Latinos in the history of hip-hop and rap music. Lissette said she felt that her ethnicity gave her access to the hip-hop/rap cultural. Hector said that having attended an institution that was culturally accepting was a facilitator to his doctoral experience because the students at Mardigras University were very tolerant of him and his New York cohort, when they were obviously culturally different. Lissette indicated that becoming a Latino role model was a facilitator to her doctoral experience because in doing lectures about rap music as a doctoral student, she was able to show other students that someone who looked like them could study rap music and get a degree at the same time.
Table 11. Cultural Factors as Component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Barrier</strong></th>
<th>Graciella</th>
<th>Angelica</th>
<th>Lissette</th>
<th>Hector</th>
<th>Marisol</th>
<th>Miguel</th>
<th>Yvette</th>
<th>Victor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Service to Puerto Ricans</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican Food, Games, Music</td>
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<td>Become Latina Role Model</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social factors as a component.**

The *Social Factors as a Component* category was created to include those doctoral experiences the participants had that were related to social events, other students, faculty, or the institutions that they either worked for or attended school at that had no relationship to personal factors, social roles or cultural factors.

**Social barriers.**

Two of the most frequently reported social barriers were Social Class and Gender.

Graciella said that having grown up in a lower socio-economic stratum served as barrier
to her doctoral experience because she had no doctors, lawyers, professors, or other professional individuals to follow as role models. Yvette indicated that social class was a barrier to her doctoral experience because some of her professor made her feel as if she should not have the same access to the level of social class enjoyed by them. Yvette indicated that some of the professors gave the impression that attaining a Ph.D. made you part of a privileged class of people that Puerto Ricans should not be part of. One other social barrier was shared by Miguel who said that the institution that he attended for his doctoral studies was so overpopulated that he could not get support from faculty until he was at the proposal stage of his dissertation. Victor reported that the catastrophic social event that occurred on September 11, 2001 was a social barrier that caused a delay in his doctoral completion. Victor said that BMCC was only blocks from the World Trade Center. After the attacks took place, BMCC was closed for weeks due to the damage and the fact that there were deceased individuals in the building. Victor said that this event meant that he had to deal with the trauma that his students experienced as well as his own.

*Social facilitators.*

The most frequently reported social facilitator was having access to a peer network. Graciella, Hector, Miguel, Yvette, and Victor indicated that they had access to peers who were not Latino (or not necessarily all Latino) who they could rely on for support on their doctoral studies. The second most frequently reported social facilitator was having Faculty Support. Hector, Marisol, Miguel, and Yvette reported being able to get support from faculty members who were not necessarily Latino. The third most
frequently reported social facilitator was Faculty Privilege Status. Angelica, Marisol, and Victor indicated that they had special access to Broadway, Prospect, and BMCC offices and computers, which helped them to complete their doctoral work. They all indicated that they were given flexible schedules and were permitted to do their work on their doctoral assignments while at work, which assisted a great deal. Other social facilitators mentioned were Gender, Institutional Support, and Ease of Program. Where some participants indicated that gender was a barrier to their doctoral experience, Lissette said that her gender served as a facilitator. Lissette said that although she had to deal with the sexual advances of her male interviewees, they were still willing to be interviewed despite the fact that she rejected their overtures or brought her husband to the interviews. Hector reported that the institutional support that he received was a facilitator to his doctoral experience because Prospect and Mardigras University worked together as educational institutions to bring Mardigras University instructors to Prospect College. Hector said that he was conveniently able to take classes and never leave his building.

**Response to research question two: analysis of the variables/model of study.**

This study described and explained the perspectives of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates on their education by exploring those social and cultural factors that influenced their perceptions, and served as educational facilitators or obstacles to their doctoral process. The first research question that guided the study was, “What were the components of their perceptions?”
Table 12. Social Factors as Component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Graciella</th>
<th>Angelica</th>
<th>Lissette</th>
<th>Hector</th>
<th>Marisol</th>
<th>Miguel</th>
<th>Yvette</th>
<th>Victor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Network</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Support</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Support: Ease of Program</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Class</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I answered this question in the previous section by indicating that the components of the participants’ perception were Personal Factors, Social Role Factors, Cultural Factors, and Social Factors (discussed in detail in the previous section). The second research question was, “What social-cultural variables influence their perspectives?” In order to provide a comprehensive response to this question, I will provide an analysis of those variables that were subsumed within the above listed components. I will also summarize what I gleaned from the analysis by providing the reader with a model of the study. Figure 10 lists all of the variables by component, and the capitalized variables were those that were reported by four or more participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Factors</th>
<th>Social Roles</th>
<th>Cultural Factors</th>
<th>Social Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barriers/Internal</td>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Rejection: Pregnant</td>
<td>ADULT LEARNER</td>
<td>NO LATINO ROLE MODELS</td>
<td>Social Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Attitude: Standardized Tests</td>
<td>WORKER</td>
<td>NEGATIVE EVENT BY ETHNICITY</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELF-EFFICACY</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Gender Role</td>
<td>Institution Overpopulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to Loss of Child</td>
<td>SON/DAUGHTER</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>Catastrophic Social Event: 9-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear: Not Good Enough</td>
<td>SPOUSE/SIGNIFICANT OTHER</td>
<td>Latino Cohort</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procrastination</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>Latino Role Model</td>
<td>PEER NETWORKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers/External</td>
<td>Adult Learner</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Faculty Status Privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LACK OF FINANCES</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Institution Culturally Accepting</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators/Internal</td>
<td>Son/Daughter</td>
<td>Latino Community</td>
<td>Social Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive to Succeed</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Service to Puerto Ricans</td>
<td>FACULTY SUPPORT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest: Dissertation Topic</td>
<td>Spouse/Significant Other</td>
<td>Puerto Rican Food, Games, Music</td>
<td>Institutional Support: Ease of Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td>Becoming Latino Role Model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualization</td>
<td>Religious Affiliate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator/External</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINANCIAL AID</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. Variable Responses by Component: Capitalized Variables Were Reported by Four or More Participants
In analyzing the participants’ data, I observed that there was a great deal of variability in their responses. In fact, the only unanimous variable in common to all of the participants was the report that being an Adult Learner, or doctoral student, interacted with at least one other social role to cause a negative experience during the participants’ doctoral process. However, there were experiences that were common to most (four or more) of the participants. In developing a model for this study, I focused on those commonalities.

There were a total of 45 variables or subthemes reported that I sorted into the four components or main themes of the participants’ doctoral experience. It was interesting that for this group of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates, more facilitators to their experiences (26) were reported than barriers (19). Of the facilitators, more cultural facilitators (8) were reported than any other type of facilitator, and of the barriers, more internal personal factors were reported as barriers than any other (6). Another observation that I made was that some participants reported the same variable as either a barrier or facilitator, which indicates a lack of consensus in what the participants perceived as helpful or hurtful. Similarly, some variables were reported by the same participant as both a facilitator and barrier, which suggests that some participants were ambivalent about certain variables. This was especially evident among the social role variables. For instance, with Graciella’s situation, being married to her husband facilitated her doctoral experience because he was able and willing to taking care of her daughters while she went to school. On the other hand, Graciella felt guilty about having to ask for his help
and she questioned whether bathing and feeding the children was an appropriate role for a Puerto Rican husband.

As far as those barriers and facilitators most reported by the participants, by component, all of the participants reported having a negative experience because of the interaction between being an adult learner and the obligations with at least one other social role. The social roles that were reported as most problematic were the interaction of being an Adult Learner and being a Worker, Son/Daughter (the participant had an issue with a parent), and Spouse/Significant Other. The most commonly reported negative interaction was that of being an Adult Learner and being a Worker (reported by 7 of the 8 individuals). The negative experiences ranged from the interaction causing the participants to procrastinate completion of their dissertation (Hector) to halting the collection of their dissertation data (Miguel). There were an equal number of reports of negative interaction between the role of Adult Learner and the role of Son/Daughter and Spouse/Significant Other. As far as the interaction of Adult Learner and Son/Daughter, the negative interaction ranged from the participant being the child of a parent(s) who could not help them educationally because of the parents limited education as in Marisol’s case (parent with limited education) and Miguel’s case (parents not educated in the United States) to being the child of a parent who passed away while the participant was working on their doctorate, as in Graciella, Angelica, and Victor’s cases. In Victor’s case, the death of his mother caused him to stop-out and return to school the next semester. As far as negative the interaction reported between being an Adult Learner and Spouse/Significant Other, the participants experiences ranged from feeling guilty
(Graciella’s case) to being in relationships that ended either during the participants’ doctoral process (Miguel’ & Marisol) or because the participant attained a doctorate (Angelica). Angelica reported that her marriage eventually dissolved because the couple grew apart after she attained her doctorate. Miguel’ experience with the interaction of Adult Learner and Significant Other had such a negative impact that his dissertation progress was delayed over the unraveling of that relationship.

Finances were reported as both a facilitator and barrier. Six of the eight participants reported that having a lack of finances was a barrier to their doctoral experience. Most of these reports were made by participants who lost their fellowships, and two of the reports were made by participants who paid for their doctorate out-of-pocket. On the other hand, five of the participants reported that being the recipient of a fellowship was key to the completion of their doctorate.

Four of the participants reported experiencing a lack of self-efficacy at some point during their doctoral process. It is interesting that all four of these individuals reported feeling insecure about their abilities, and being unsure if they would “fit in” because of their ethnicity. All four reported that the lack Latino faculty and other Latino students in their programs amplified their sense of insecurity.

As far as Social Factors, five participants reported that having the support of peer networks facilitated their experience, and four individuals reported that that having faculty support was indispensible to their doctoral success. In sum, based on the analysis of the data, the model of this study would indicate that the most profound influence to the perception of the participants’ lived doctoral experiences was that of the interaction of
being a doctoral student, or Adult Learner, with at least one other social role. The most commonly reported negative interaction was simultaneously being an Adult Learner and Worker. Having a lack of Finances, No Latino Role Models, experiencing Negative Events by Ethnicity, and struggling with a lack of Self-Efficacy served as barriers or negative influences. Having Peer Networks and Faculty Support served as facilitators or positive influences to the perceptions of the participants’ doctoral experiences. The model of this study is depicted in figure 11.

Figure 11. Model the Study

**Variable Common To All:** Interaction of Adult Learner and One or More of the Listed Social Roles

**Personal Factors:**
- **Barrier:** Self-Efficacy & Lack of Finances
- **Facilitators:** Financial Aid

*Experienced by Most

**Social Roles Barriers:**
- Worker, Son/Daughter, Spouse/Significant Other

*Experienced by all

**Cultural Barriers:**
- No Latino Role Models, Negative Event by Ethnicity

*Experienced by Most

**Social Facilitators:**
- Peer Network, Faculty Support

*Experienced by Most

**Implications of the Study**

In the following section, I will describe the implications of this study to future or current Latino doctoral students, implications for college faculty and educational institutions, and implications for future research in the area of Latino doctoral attainment.
Implications for future or current doctoral students.

This study sought to explore the perceptions of a group of Puerto Ricans who have attained a doctorate and the social and cultural influences that had an impact on their experiences. The stories that the participants have shared are valuable in a number of ways, and they are probably most valuable to those Puerto Ricans, Latinos, or members of educationally underrepresented groups. Why? Because this group of individuals was able to attain a doctorate, and become part of the exceptional 1.5% of individuals that have earned this level of achievement, despite the odds and barriers. What this suggests is that if this group of individuals can do it, others can too, if they so choose. It is just a matter of knowing what to expect and knowing what to do based on the experiences of others, like the individuals who participated in this study. Based on my analysis of the participants’ data, I have put together a list of things that helped them to persist educationally and led them to eventual doctoral success. I have also provided the participants’ advice to current or future Latino doctoral students.

Yes, they did and this is how: advice from the trenches.

The participants of this study faced and overcame a number of barriers in order to successfully complete their doctoral programs. They also took advantage of a number of facilitators that helped lead them to success. Based on this information, future doctoral students can use the participants’ prior experiences to potentially develop a strategy for their own success. Based on my analysis of what the participants said worked for them, I developed a list of mental and social tactics the participants employed, which led them to doctoral attainment. Starting with the mental tactics, some of the participants reported
having an unwavering focus on their doctoral success. This may be difficult for doctoral students who have jobs, are married and are raising families; however, Graciella and Angelica are proof that it can be done. Some participants indicated that they were successful because they were able to multitask and make good use of their time, which is imperative for all doctoral students, but especially for those who have jobs and families. Some participants reported being very organized, having clear priorities, and being determined to complete their doctoral program despite competing responsibilities. Although difficult to do, some of the participants said that it was helpful to create a distraction free environment to work in and they compartmentalized their work space. Other mental qualities that were reported were having a strong mental attitude, being optimistic, self-motivated, and being persistent. It was also helpful for some participants to have an internal locus of control, to be able to related learning to their lives, and to have a strong sense of Puerto Rican identity.

Some social tactics that participants employed included finding other Latinos that offered support, keeping in touch with friends and family, and making good use of support networks by following the advice of others. The participants also indicated that they found faculty who were willing to support their academic goals, they used their academic skill to help other Puerto Ricans, and they surrounded themselves with other individuals who wanted to succeed.

Other tactics that the participants employed included exercising regularly, listening to enjoyable music, praying or engaging in spiritual practice, and taking more
time to complete the doctorate in order to maintain a social balance. I have provided the list of tactics employed by the participants by the frequency reported in figure 12.

**Current advice from the participants.**

I asked the participants for their advice to future or current doctoral students now that they have successfully completed their doctorate. Beginning with advice to future doctoral students, the participants advised that the doctoral process needs to be demystified. A number of them said that often students believe that the doctorate unattainable, but according to participants like Graciella and Angelica, it is merely another process.

Angelica said that the process needs to broke down into manageable steps and needs be viewed as a process that begins with attaining a high school diploma, and once that is accomplished then an Associates or Bachelor’s Degree, followed by a Master’s Degree and then a doctorate. In other words, just as one degree is attainable, so are the others. They are just different steps in the process. Other advice included being sure to research carefully to find a doctoral institution that will be a good fit for the doctoral student’s goals. In addition, it was advised that future doctoral students should believe in themselves and be committed to what they want.

For current doctoral students, numerous suggestions were made beginning with the advice that doctoral students working on their dissertations should write something every day. Doctoral students should be persistent and realize that the doctorate is a test at every level and is designed to be weeding. One participant suggested that one way that
Latinos can become a role model is to get a doctorate themselves, so that other Latinos can see that it can be done.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency Cited</th>
<th>Tactics Employed by Participants that Facilitated Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1. Found other Latinos that offered support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2. Kept in touch with friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3. Had unwavering focus on doctoral attainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4. Excellent at multitasking: made good use of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5. Exercised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6. Listened to enjoyable music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7. Had internal locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8. Found faculty to support academic goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9. Used academic skill to help other Puerto Ricans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10. Was persistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11. Had a strong sense of Puerto Rican identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12. Prayed or practiced spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13. Chose to take more time to complete the doctorate but maintained balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14. Was determined to complete doctorate despite competing responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15. Was optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16. Was self-motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>17. Related learning to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18. Had strong mental attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19. Was extremely organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20. Physically compartmentalized work space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21. Had clear priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22. Surrounded themselves with people who wanted to succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23. Made good use of support networks: followed advise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>24. Created distraction free environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12. Tactics Employed by Participants that Facilitated Doctoral Success
Another participant indicated that doctoral students need to learn how to respond to institutions so that the system works for them, meaning if the student is criticized they should be humble about it and decide for themselves if they want to accept the criticism or not. Current doctoral students should not procrastinate; they should be focused, and should avoid getting involved in long distance relationships. Doctoral students should know why they want to get a doctorate and what they plan to do with it. They should look toward family and friends for support, and they should find other Latinos who believe in them, so that they will believe in themselves. Finally, while writing their dissertation, doctoral students should be prepared to justify their decisions and methods. I have provided the list of advice to current and future Latino doctoral students in figure 13 by frequency reported.

**Implications to Faculty and Institutions: Suggestions for Future Research.**

During the course of my interviews with the participants I asked them how we could increase the representation of Latino doctoral graduates. Their responses coalesced into two sections, advice for faculty and advice for administrators of academic institutions. In this next section, I will provide the implications for faculty and institutions based on the responses of the participants, and the results of my data analysis. It should be noted that all but one of the participants are faculty with decades of experience working in higher education and five of the participants are OPENGATE counselors who often work with minority students in an effort to ensure they persist academically.
### Advice to Future/Current Latino Doctoral Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency Cited</th>
<th>Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1. Demystify the process: the doctorate is doable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2. While in the dissertation writing process: write something every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3. Break down the goal of attaining a doctorate into small steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4. Be persistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5. Realize that the doctorate is a test and is weeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6. Be a Latino role model: earn a doctorate yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7. Learn how to respond to institutions: work the system in your favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8. Don’t procrastinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9. Be focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10. Shoot for the highest: start thinking about the doctorate early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11. Avoid long distance romantic relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12. Know why you want your doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13. Research and select a doctoral program that will meet your career goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14. Believe in yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15. Look toward your family and friends for support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16. Enjoy yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>17. Find Latino people that believe in you and you will believe in yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18. Be committed: know what you want and get it done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19. Be prepared to justify your dissertation decisions and methods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 13. Advise to Future/Current Latino Doctoral Students**

Some advice offered by the participants was directed toward teachers at the K-12 level. One participant suggested that teachers need to be better prepared to teach our
youth and more needs to be done to prevent Latino youth from failing educationally, as early as middle school. Faculty need to change how they teach young adults and the suggestion was made that these students be given hands-on-projects. Another participant suggested that Latino faculty need to do more to support Latino students.

A suggestion for administrators at the K-12 level is to lengthen the school year and give the faculty and students shorter more frequent breaks. One participant indicated that administrators need to raise the value of education and one way to do that is to ensure that faculty and staff are paid commensurate to their level of education. Doing so will give Latino students more of an incentive to continue through the educational pipeline.

One participant suggested that more needs to be done to make Latinos aware of advanced educational opportunities. Information could be disseminated via the media and Latino organizations. Other advice offered included encouraging Latinos to get an associate’s degree before they get a bachelor’s degree in order to increase the likelihood of continued educational success. In addition, institutions need to start getting Latino students connected to higher educational institutions while the students are still in high school. Lastly, college students need to be given mentors rather than advisors or counselors.

One of the participants suggested that college admission practices need to be examined because Latino youth are applying to advanced educational programs but are not being accepted. Educational institutions need to focus more on the educational
journey rather than the goal so that a love for learning can be created, and education needs to be more holistic and empowering.

Other suggestions offered included having institutions increase Latino faculty recruitment efforts along with making an effort to retain faculty once they are acquired. Finally, more needs to be done to make scholarships available for Latinos who want to pursue advanced levels of education.

I think that there were two bits of advice that were offered that should be researched further. The first is a comment made by one of the participants’ that the educational pipeline needs to be addressed because Latinos keep falling off at every stage. The second was a comment made that the crisis in education needs to addressed because African Americans and Latinos are vulnerable groups. I have provided a list of advice to faculty and administrators from the participants in figure 14.

**Recommendations, Findings, and Conclusions**

**Recommendations for future research.**

My concern with the underrepresentation of Latinos with doctorates served to motivate me to conduct this study, and also served as a point of focus in terms of making this study useful to others. Although my research questions were geared toward exploring the perceptions of Puerto Ricans with the doctoral process, the rationale behind finding the information was to share it with others who would read their stories and become inspired to continue along the educational pipeline until they reached doctoral attainment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency Cited</th>
<th>Advice to Faculty &amp; Institutions from Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1. The educational pipeline needs to be addressed because Latinos keep falling off at every stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2. Latinos in faculty positions need to support young Latinos so that they can be successful too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3. The value of education needs to be raised: people should get paid commensurate to their level of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4. Latino students need to be given more incentives to get an education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5. Latinos need to be made more aware of advanced educational opportunities via the media and Latino organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6. Latino students need to be encouraged to attain an associate’s degree before attempting to attain a bachelor’s degree: this will increase the likelihood of continued educational success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7. Institutions need to start getting Latino students connected to higher educational institutions while the students are still in high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8. Universities need to provide students with mentors rather than advisors or counselors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9. In order to prevent losing our Latino youth as early as middle school, we need to change how we teach them: they need to be given hands-on-projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10. In order to help our Latino youth, the school year should be lengthened and shorter more frequent breaks should be given.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11. Teachers need to be better prepared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12. It would be helpful if Latino teachers would teach Latino students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13. College admissions processes need to be looked at because Latino students are applying but being accepted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14. Educational institutions need to focus more on the educational journey than the goal: a love for learning needs to be created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15. Education needs to be more holistic and empowering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16. The crisis in education needs to be addressed because African Americans and Latinos are vulnerable groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>17. There needs to be more Latino faculty recruitment efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18. There needs to be more of an effort to retain Latino faculty one acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19. There needs to be more Latino scholarships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14. Advice to Faculty & Institutions from Participants
In conducting the literature review for this study, I became alarmed at the dismal statistics. Based on the research and the results of this study, it is evident that more needs to be done to address the Latino education gap, and this should begin with conducting more research at all levels of the Latino educational pipeline. The least amount of research has been conducted at the higher end of the pipeline. This could be because so few Latino students make it through. However, the results of this research suggests that if the representation of Latinos with advanced degrees increases, the existence of Latino role models will increase as well, and perhaps other Latinos will be encouraged to continue their education. Hence, one suggestion for future research should be in the area of Latino mentorship. Specifically, the impact of Latino mentors on the self-efficacy and educational success of Latino students should be exam further. This is because most of the participants in this study indicated that they struggled with their sense self-efficacy because of there was a lack of Latino role models to make them feel secure about their educational abilities.

Other recommendations for future research, based on the results of this study, include the impact of finances on the persistence and departure of Latino students, the impact of social roles, and the impact of peer networks, and faculty support at various levels of the Latino educational pipeline. In addition, more research should be conducted in order to further identify the frequency of negative events by ethnicity that has been experienced by other Latino students at all levels of the educational pipeline, especially if those occurrences have been perpetrated by faculty members. Identifying more current instances may prompt institutional policy change that will ban such faculty conduct, and
thereby prevent future generations of Latinos from having the same negative and
discouraging experiences at institutions of learning.

Finally, I recommend that this study be replicated using the data of more recent
doctoral graduates. One of the limitations of this study was the fact that some of the
research participants graduated decades ago, which made it difficult for them to
remember the nuances of their doctoral experience. It would also be interesting to
replicate this study with a sample of all women doctoral graduates who were married,
worked and raising children during the process. My recommendation is based on the fact
that Graciella’s and Angelica’s accounts were amazing because they were able to juggle
the social roles of Adult Learner, Wife, Parent, and Worker at the same time. It is stories
like these that will encourage women juggling similar responsibilities to continue their
education because women like Graciella and Angelica were able to do so.

**Findings.**

As I bring this study to a close, I would like to recap the findings of this study.
This study described and explained the perspectives of a purposive sample of Puerto
Rican doctoral graduates on their education by exploring those social and cultural factors
that influenced their perceptions, and served as educational facilitators or obstacles to
their doctoral attainment. The questions that guided the study were: 1. What are the
components of their perspectives? and 2. What social-cultural variables influenced their
perspectives?

In order to answer the research questions, I interviewed eight Puerto Ricans with
doctorates who were affiliated with the GOTHAM educational system in the state of New
York. In order to collect the data, I went to New York in February and March 2010 and conducted face to face interviews with the participants, which were recorded. After I recorded the interviews, I transcribed the data, which I analyzed using a software program called Atlas.ti. I analyzed the data by coding the excerpts, which I identified as the subthemes or variables of this study. The subthemes were coalesced into major themes, which were validated by iterations of member checks, peer review, and data triangulation. After reaching a consensus at all levels of validation, I determined that the emergent themes were in fact evidence of the components of the perceptions of the participants’ experiences with doctoral attainment. Those components are Personal Factors, Social Roles, Cultural Factors, and Social Factors.

In sum, based on the analysis of the data, the most profound influence to the perception of the participants’ lived doctoral experiences was the interaction of being a doctoral student, or Adult Learner, with at least one other social role. The most commonly reported negative interaction, or barrier to the doctoral process, was being an Adult Learner and a Worker at the same time. Having a lack of Finances, No Latino Role Models, experiencing Negative Events by Ethnicity, and struggling with Self-Efficacy served as barriers to most of the participants. Having Peer Networks and Faculty Support served as facilitators to most of the participants. In order to add to the usefulness of this study, I asked the participants for their advice to future or current doctoral students, and for suggestions to faculty and administrators of educational institutions. I included their advice and suggestions as part of this study.
Conclusion.

In sum, I hope that the contents of this study will serve to inspire other Latinos to continue through the educational pipeline to the level of doctoral success. In completing this work, I am now am one step closer to completing my doctorate. I feel good knowing that I will soon join the exclusive but not elusive 1.5% of the general population that has attained a doctorate. I have done my part to defy the odds showing that Latinos can “do this.” And, if I can do it, others can too!

I would like to conclude this study by dedicating a poem that I wrote to my research participants who made this study possible and have been integral to my doctoral success. I would also like the readers to know that when I initially became interested in the topic for this study, I had no idea that I would end up collecting my data in the state of New York. I could not have been more inspired having conducted my fieldwork in New York City with the pulse of Manhattan there to keep me energized.
The Message

By Doreen Rivera Rapp

Dreams
Born in restless sleep
With the City’s concrete
Paved with broken glass
As their foundation

Dreams
Day or Night
Of waiting for something
Wide Eyed
Mind Racing

I waited...

One day
The voice spoke to me
In the shadow of my dreams
And said
Lift the veil and see the truth

And when the time was right
The concrete path revealed itself to me again
Not paved with glass but with gold
And the voice said, “Go back to this place.”
The City of Lights
Of Pulse
Of Motion

So I went to that place
Where I was led and found them
And I saw the reflection of myself
Revealed in the eyes of those who looked like me

And the voice said
Witness and speak the truth
So others will hear and see you
And will find the same hidden path
After I returned home from that place
I realized that the voice was my own
And that the path was not a place
But a purpose
And that the voice was not a sound
But a message

I am the messenger
And this is the message:

Yes, they did
Yes, I did
It can be done
And you can too!
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Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3310970)

Appendices
Appendix A: Explanatory Letter to Interviewees

Dear ________________________,

My name is Doreen Rivera Rapp and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Adult, Career and Higher Education at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. I am pursuing my dissertation topic titled “A Descriptive Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates”. The purpose of the study is to describe and explain the experiences Puerto Rican doctoral graduates with the process of doctoral attainment. Your participation is requested because I believe that you are a doctoral graduate of Puerto Rican ethnicity. My literature review yielded no studies or articles about Puerto Ricans with the experience of obtaining a doctorate. I think that this will be a great opportunity for you to share your story about your experience with others.

Participation in the study will require approximately one or two one-hour in-depth interviews. The interviews will, with your permission, be taped and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will not be identified by name on the tape. I will be transcribing the tapes. An outside reader will read the transcription of the tape; however, they will be able to identify the research participants by the letters A, B, C etc. The audio files will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my house.

Each participant will be offered a copy of the audio files as well as a copy of the transcription. The participants and I will be the only ones with access to the audio files. The master audio file will remain in my possession and will be destroyed three years after the publication of the dissertation. Interviews will be arranged at your convenience. The tentative schedule calls for one interview in January or February 2010 and one interview tentatively in March 2010. In addition, you may be asked to share relevant artifacts and documents. Your name and the name and any other information gathered in this study will remain confidential and will only be used for educational purposes. I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my request. I look forward to your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Doreen Rivera Rapp
University of South Florida
Doctoral Candidate

XXX-XXX-XXXX
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Protocol A

1. What was your doctoral school experience like?

2. Which program did you attend?

3. What are your views on graduate study?

4. What was a typical day like for you?

5. What was your worst experience?

6. What things did you find frustrating?

7. What was your best experience?

8. What things did you find helpful?

9. What social influences affected your graduate school experience?

10. What cultural influences affected your graduate school experience?

11. What you might change about your experience?

12. Is there anything that you would like to add, change, or delete from what you have just told me?
Appendix C: Member Check Form

Dear ________________________________.

Thank you for an enjoyable and insightful interview. Attached please find a draft copy of the verbatim transcripts of the interview. Please review the transcription for accuracy and completeness of responses. Please feel free to contact me at (XXX-XXX-XXXX) or via email at (doreenXXX@XXX.com) should you have any questions. If I do not hear from you by ________, _____2010, I will assume that you agree with the attached draft of the transcription.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study.

Doreen Rivera Rapp
Appendix D: Peer Reviewer Instructions

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your participation as a peer reviewer for my dissertation titled “A Descriptive Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates.” I have twice interviewed 8 co-researchers, for a total of 16 transcripts, during the course of this study. As part of the analysis process, I have identified quotes (or excerpts) from the interview transcripts that I would like to analyze, in order to identify emergent themes. I have coded the quotes using the below list of codes that I created. In order to ensure that I have coded the quotes properly, I am asking you to code the quotes that I have extracted so that I can compare your choices to my own.

In order to guide you with the review process, I have provided you with a list of codes and code definitions. I have also provided you with a copy of the quotes that I have extracted from each of the transcripts, and along with a copy of the associated transcript in its entirety, so that you can read the quotes in context. I would like you to code the quotes that I have extracted from the transcripts, using the below list of codes, and code definitions. Feel free to add codes if needed. You can also modify the code definitions if so you choose. After you complete your review, please e-mail me your responses and scan and e-mail me your signed Peer Reviewer Form. You can also mail me, via U.S. Mail, your signed Peer Reviewer Form if you so choose, address: XXXXXXXXXXXXX.

Thank you in advance,

Doreen Rivera Rapp

XXX-XXX-XXXX
Appendix E: Signed Peer Review Forms

Peer Reviewer Form

I, Carmeda Stokes, have served as a reviewer for “A Descriptive Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates” by Doreen Rivera Rapp. In this role, I have worked with the researcher in capacities such as reviewing the analysis of transcripts and assisting in emerging issues.

Sign: Signature on File

Date: 7/16/10
Peer Reviewer Form

I, Emmanuel Jean Francois, have served as a reviewer for “A Descriptive Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates” by Doreen Rivera Rapp. In this role, I have worked with the researcher in capacities such as reviewing the analysis of transcripts and assisting in emerging issues.

Sign: Signature on File

Date: 8/25/10
I, Martha Baker, have served as a reviewer for “A Descriptive Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates” by Doreen Rivera Rapp. In this role, I have worked with the researcher in capacities such as reviewing the analysis of transcripts and assisting in emerging issues.

Sign: Signature on File

Date: 8/17/10
Certificate of Completion

Doreen Rapp

Has Successfully Completed the Course in

Foundations in Human Research Protections at USF

On

Saturday, October 31, 2009

USF
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA
Appendix G: IRB Form Used for Pilot Study #108113

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study # 108113

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called The Perceptions of Puerto Rican Women Doctoral Graduates With Multiple Role Balance: A Qualitative Study.

The person who is in charge of this research study is Doreen Rivera Rapp. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge.

The research will be conducted at an interview site of the participant(s) choosing. The Principal Investigator, Doreen Rivera Rapp, is paying for this research.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain the perspectives of Puerto Rican Women Doctoral Graduates concerning their graduate school experience. The study will explore how these students managed multiple social role demands, while pursuing their education, will delve into how these students prioritize social roles within the context of the Puerto Rican culture, and will explore the impact that gender had on their graduate student social role prioritization. This study is being conducted for a dissertation.

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview that is expected to be 45 minutes to an hour in length. The interview will be audio recorded with a digital recorder. The interview will take place at a place of your choosing. The Principal Researcher will transcribe the interview. You will be given a copy of the transcript to ensure that the transcript is accurate. The Principal Researcher will have the only copy of the transcript and audio recording, unless you request a copy of one or both. The audio recording, transcript, and any other materials provided by you will be retained by the
Principal Researcher in a locked cabinet at the Principal Researcher’s office for a period of five years.

**Alternatives**

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study and you may end the interview at any time.

**Benefits/Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study. Additionally, you are not expected to benefit from participating in this study, and you will not be paid for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality**

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. The Principal Researcher will retain the audio recording of your interview, a copy of the interview transcript, and any other documents that you provide for a period of five years. The items will be kept at the Principal Researcher’s office, in a locked cabinet.

However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, research nurses, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. These include:
  - The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.
  - The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are.

**Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the investigator or the research staff. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.
Questions, concerns, or complaints
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Doreen Rivera Rapp at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-9343.

If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in this research study you may contact the Florida Department of Health Institutional Review Board (DOH IRB) at (866) 433-2775 (toll free in Florida) or 850-245-4585.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study
It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

______________________________   ______________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study       Date

______________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

- What the study is about.
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used.
- What the potential benefits might be.
- What the known risks might be.

______________________________   ______________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent       Date

______________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix H: Pilot Study

Martha’s Vignette: The Marathon Woman

Martha graduated from the University of South Florida in May of 2009. She is a Puerto Rican woman, and she is 54 years of age. Martha’s parents were both Puerto Rican and are not college educated. She has a number of siblings, all who have college degrees, and Martha was the first person in her family to graduate with a college degree. Martha has children and grandchildren. She serves in a leadership position at her church and she is active in politics. In fact, Martha took time off during her doctoral studies to run for political office. Martha works full-time and she was a school principal, while pursuing her doctorate, which took Martha a total of 9 years to complete.

Overarching Theme: Educational Facilitators & Educational Obstacles

How did she do it?: She complete her studies by doing “Weekend Marathons”

Social Influences: Martha said she, “Wore many hats.”

Cultural Influences: Martha said that she battled with family requirements, or what people would see as an appropriate life of a Puerto Rican Women- she was raised by a stay-at-home-mom. Her mother was her role model. She was the first in her family to graduate from college.
Appendix I: Researcher’s Journal: Positioning My Self in the Research

November 16, 2009

Why I Chose This Topic?

Choosing a dissertation topic is a difficult task because of the implications of the choice. This is because the researcher will have to live with the data during the protracted dissertation process, and because the researcher will be known by this major research endeavor. I initially experienced doubt about choosing this topic, for fear of being “too close to it.” I knew that as a researcher, I would have to interrogate my intentions and biases in order to conduct a study that would be meaningful to me and helpful to others.

The impetus behind my decision to research the educational experiences of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates came from my own educational journey and experiences. During the course of my studies, I observed that Latinos appeared to be underrepresented at the educational institutions that I attended. I often asked myself, “Where are the others?” To date, I have only had two Latino professors, and both were Cuban. I have never had a Puerto Rican teacher or professor, which has led me to ask another question, “What’s going on with the Puerto Ricans?” Therefore, as I embark upon the process of this dissertation, I take on the challenge of it as if it were a quest- with a great deal of excitement anticipating who I might meet and what I might find during this last voyage, this last major project, of my formal education.

My Story

I am a first generation Puerto Rican born in the United States and I was raised in Brooklyn, New York. Both of my parents migrated to the United States as children,
hence they both spoke English and valued being American. Although I was not aware of it at the time, I was born into a “high risk” situation that presented educational barriers that I had to negotiate from grade school to high school. Some of those barriers included being raised in a high crime, drug infested area that consisted of a combination of low income and working class residents. The lure of fast money and idle life style was ever present because I intermingled with burglars, drug dealers, welfare recipients, teenage mothers, and working adults alike.

Despite these barriers, there were internal and external factors that helped facilitate my educational journey. Internally, I loved to read and I was athletically inclined. Externally, my parents played an important role. My mother valued education and placed me in preschool, which helped foster my interest in reading. My parents ensured that I had an abundance of books and sports equipment, which kept me focused on being productive during my early years.

Although my parents are not college educated, they both worked full-time, which helped me to develop a good work ethic and helped me to understand the value and impact of having a job. It was this sense of pride in work that deterred me from a life of crime, drugs, and the cycle of welfare. I began working at the age of 16 and I quickly realized the value of money and the relationships between education, occupation, and financial capital. However, because I did not know of any Latinos with professional jobs, I lacked the confidence and vision to pursue those occupations that required higher education. Instead, I took courses in typing and word processing, and when I graduated from community college, I went to work at a bank as a loan processor. Since my parents
did not have college degrees, they were not available to assist me with the college
enrollment and the course registration process. They also did not assist me with tuition,
so I worked and attended college. The fact that I worked and traveled by bus over an hour
to attend school had an impact on my grades, but I managed to graduate anyhow, thereby
becoming the first person in my family to attain a college degree.

After I graduated from community college, my parents moved the family to
Tampa, a few miles away from the University of South Florida. I settled in and became a
clerk typist, but quickly outgrew this job. This led me to enroll at University of South
Florida where I earned a bachelor’s degree in criminology. I subsequently entered the
field of law enforcement. My parents discouraged me from pursuing this line of work,
because they felt that it was unfitting for a five foot tall, Puerto Rican female. Instead,
they encouraged me to get married and have a family.

It was not my destiny to marry early; instead, I worked in law enforcement, first
as a probation officer and then as a patrol officer at the University of South Florida
campus. After working in patrol for a few years, I pursued a Master’s Degree in Adult
Education and in doing so, exceeded all expectations of myself.

In fact, pursuing a doctorate seemed out of my reach, until my Major Professor,
Dr. Young, convinced me otherwise. When I applied for doctoral studies at the
University of South Florida, I applied as an Education Doctorate student because I did
not think I had the ability to pass the statistics courses required of the Doctor of
Philosophy Degree. However, I took statistics, did excellent, then took the advice of a
fellow doctoral student and switched programs.
I am now a PH. D. candidate. I work full-time as a law enforcement lieutenant for a State Law Enforcement Agency, and I am married. I can now look back at my educational experiences and see how much I have overcome. Many of the barriers that I overcame were related to the environment that I was brought up in and the lack of role models that were educated and that had professional jobs. The lack of role models gave me a sense that having a profession that required a high level of education was not accessible to me, and that the stereotypes about Puerto Ricans being unintelligent were true. These factors had an impact on my sense of self-efficacy up until recent years.

In terms of educational facilitators, it was my parents that provided me with a good educational foundation by placing me in preschool, and encouraging my love of reading. Although they were not college educated, they worked hard, which showed me the value of having a job. The faculty at the University of South Florida, especially my Major Professor, Dr. Young, were very encouraging during my graduate school years and were instrumental to the educational successes that I have achieved thus far.

The challenges that I have experienced as a doctoral candidate are related to my desire to work on my dissertation, my desire to spend time with my husband and extended family, and my obligations to my job. Because I am a non-traditional student, social role strain is a daily challenge, but one that I have been able to overcome thus far. One of the benefits of exploring the experiences of other Puerto Rican doctoral students qualitatively is that we will have the opportunity as co-researchers to share our stories with each other, to discuss the challenges we faced and how we overcame those
challenges. I anticipate that sharing such stories is likely to inspire and encourage those who would like to read them.
Appendix J: Revised IRB Form for Dissertation

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

IRB Study # TBA

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called A Descriptive Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates. The person who is in charge of this research study is Doreen Rivera Rapp. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person-in-charge.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain the perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates concerning their graduate school experience. This study will uncover those factors that served as educational facilitators or obstacles, and will explore the social and cultural factors the influenced their perceptions. This study is being conducted for a dissertation. If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews that are expected to be 45 minutes to an hour in length. The interview will be audio recorded with a digital recorder, and will take place at a place of your choosing. The Principal Researcher will transcribe the interview. You will be given a copy of the transcript to ensure that the transcript is accurate. The Principal Researcher will have the only copy of the transcript and audio recording, unless you request a copy of one or both.

Benefits/Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study. Additionally, you are not expected to benefit from participating in this study, and you will not be paid for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

The Principal Researcher will retain the audio recording of your interview, a copy of the interview transcript, and any other documents that you provide for a period of five years. The items will be kept at the Principal Researcher’s office, in a locked cabinet.
However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are those associated with the research study, the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB), and The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are.

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Doreen Rivera Rapp at XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you have questions you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-9343. If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in this research study you may contact the Florida Department of Health Institutional Review Board (DOH IRB) at (866) 433-2775 (toll free in Florida) or 850-245-4585.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

____________________________________________   ______________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study                Date

_____________________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

_____________________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent                Date

_____________________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix K: Audit Trail

April 12, 1997- GRE Score: Verbal 460; Quantitative 400; Total 860

Fall 2005- Audited first doctoral course pending acceptance to Ed.D. program

Fall 2007- Changed from Adult Education, Ed.D. (Educational Program Development) to Adult Education Ph.D. (Curriculum & Instruction)

September 2, 2008- Applied for Doctoral Qualifying Exam, Approved October 1, 2008

September 18, 2008- Selected Doctoral Committee: Dr. Young (Major Professor), Dr. Janesick, Dr. Blank, Dr. Kromery

October 13, 14, 15, 2008- Took Doctoral Qualifying Exam

January 12, 2009- Admitted as a Doctoral Candidate in the program Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Adult Education December 12, 2008

February 1, 2009- I contacted the Hispanic Student Union at Florida State and the Cuban-American Student Association, and several Latino student organizations at the University of South Florida (including the Latin American Student Association, LASA) in attempt to locate Puerto Rican graduates with Ph.D. without success. My e-mails and telephone messages went unanswered.

March 25, 2009- Changed Doctoral Committee: removed Dr. Kromery and added Dr. Alvarez-McHatton

April 24, 2009- Based on a tip from the pilot participant, I attempted to contact T. Ortiz, a Puerto Rican with a Ph.D., who was the Director of Multilingual Services at Orange County Public School (Orlando, Florida). Attempts to contact Ortiz by e-mail and last known telephone number were unsuccessful.

April 24, 2009- After reading Katherine Fuerth’s dissertation, I contacted Fuerth by e-mail in attempt to locate Puerto Rican individuals with Ph.D.’s. Fuerth did not know of any that graduated and she suggested that I expand my study to all Latino groups.

April 24, 2009- I contacted ASPIRA of Florida Corporate Offices in Florida in attempt to locate Puerto Ricans with Ph.D.’s without success.

July 9, 2009- Interviewed pilot participant.
August 17, 2009- I found Dr. Edil Torres Rivera’s profile on-line. Rivera is a professor at the University of Florida. I sent him an e-mail asking him to participate in my study.

August 30, 2009- I found Ismael Nieves’ profile on-line and sent him an e-mail asking him if he would like to participate in my study.

August 30, 2009- Found possible participant Millie Ferrer, faculty at the University of Florida. I attempted to contact her by e-mail, but the e-mail came back “returned”.

August 30, 2009- During an internet search, Research found Lissette’s curriculum vitae. On the website, Lissette identified herself as Puerto Rican. The researcher identified a possible participant.

August 30, 2009- During an internet search, I found a possible participant, Dr. Claudia Benitez-Nelson, associate professor at the University of South Carolina. I found an e-mail address and telephone number.

September 5, 2009- Graciella agreed to participate via e-mail.

September 5, 2009- Lissette agreed to participate via e-mail.

September 5, 2009- After searching the faculty directories of a number of universities in the state of Florida, I found Dr. Ricardo Garcia’s, a Puerto Rican Ph.D., resume on-line. I e-mailed Dr. Garcia to see if he would agree to participate in my study.

September 6, 2009- Dr. Claudia Benitez-Nelson of the University of South Carolina e-mailed me and agreed to participate in the study.

September 9, 2009- Dr. Ricardo Garcia e-mailed and agreed to participate in the researcher’s study.

December 8, 2009- Miguel agreed via e-mail to participate in study.

November 1, 2009- Based on a tip from a co-worker, I looked up information about Boricua College in New York and considered contacting faculty there.

December 8, 2009- I successfully defended my dissertation proposal, “A Descriptive Study of Perspectives of Puerto Rican Doctoral Graduates

February 21, 2010- Left Tampa to New York at 7:45 am

February 22, 2010- Interviewed Graciella, 10 am, Angelica, 3 pm, and Lissette, 6 pm

February 23, 2010- Interviewed Hector, 10 am, Marisol, 1 pm, and Miguel, 5 pm
February 24, 2010- Interviewed Yvette at 10 am

February 25, 2010- Interviewed Victor at 10:30 am, and Roberto cancelled because it was snowing.

February 26, 2010- My flight was cancelled due to the snow.

February 27, 2010- Left New York to Tampa.

March 6 to March 24, 2010- I typed transcripts until two hours before my interview with Yvette.

March 21, 2010- Left Tampa to New York

March 22, 2010- Interviewed Graciella at 10am, Angelica at 3 pm, and Lissette at 6 pm

March 23, 2010- Interviewed Hector at 10 am, Marisol at 1 pm, and Miguel at 5 pm

March 24, 2010- Interviewed Yvette at 6 pm

March 25, 2010- Interviewed Victor at 10:30 am

March 26, 2010- Left New York to Tampa

April 3 to April 24- I typed the transcripts from the second round of interviews

May 8, 2010- Created Audit Trail, Skimmed Carol Berg’s dissertation, started journal (from hand written notes, pictures, and memory)

May 9, 2010- Corrected transcripts from the first round of interviews post-member check. I sent participants their transcripts and audio files from the second round of interviews along with a digital copy of their audio via e-mail. I had to use a program called Switch to convert the .wav files to small MP3 files.

May 16, 2010- Completed my participant profile draft using Graciella’s transcript to develop the profile categories. I left the boxes under everyone else’s name blank, to be filled in as I review the transcripts individually. I then printed and reviewed the Atlas.ti 6 Quick Tour manual. Although I have reviewed most of the Atlas User Guide and Reference book, which is over 200 pages long, I reviewed this book several weeks ago, and it seems that I have lost my confidence in handling the software. I started the data analysis. I analyzed half of Graciella’s transcript and I think I have a good handle on the Atlas.ti software now that I have started the analysis.
May 22, 2010- Started analyzing the second half of Graciella’s transcript. Completed the second half of Graciella’s transcript and completed all of Angelica’s transcript. I tweaked, deleted, added, and renamed several codes. I added comments to all of the codes, to explain what they mean. I also added comments to some of the quotes associated with the codes, especially some of the more emotional quotes.

May 23, 2010- Started and finished analyzing Marisol’s transcript. I added some more codes and consolidated others, which meant that I had to change code selections for Graciella’s and Angelica’s transcripts. I am glad that I am tweaking the codes as I go. I completed analyzing Yvette’s transcript. That makes four total transcripts analyzed up to this point.

May 29, 2010- I completed analyzing Miguel’ and Lissette’s transcripts. I continued to review my codes as I conducted the analysis. I now have 29 codes so it is becoming difficult to keep track and remember the context (definition) for which I am using the codes. I printed a copy and the document printed about seven pages. I realize that I am going to have to spend some time reorganizing the codes, sorting them into families, and I’m probably going to have to go back and reread all of the transcripts to ensure that quotes are sorted into the correct code and that nothing got left out. The possibility of leaving some quotes out is a concern because I keep adding codes as read more and transcripts. I add codes as I start to see patterns. Sometimes the patterns are unique to a particular transcript but I can’t take that for granted. This is why I am going to have to go back and reread everything.

May 30, 2010- Today I analyzed five transcripts: Hector’s, interview one, and from interview two, Graciella, Angelica, Marisol, and Yvette. I added more codes, and refined/added definition to those codes that I already had. It is becoming increasing difficult to keep track of the definitions of the codes. Many are similar. After I am done coding all of the transcripts, I will review the codes that I have and do some consolidation. I will then review the transcripts again to ensure that I have coded the quotes properly based on the consolidation. I will then start sorting the codes into families. I am hoping to analyze the last four transcripts tomorrow. I reread Dr. Janesick’s book Stretching Exercises for Qualitative Researchers in an effort to prepare for the imminent in depth analysis and writing that I am about to do (see sample Journal Entry: The Memorial Day Epiphany)

May 31, 2010- I coded the last 4 transcripts, for a total of 16. I ended up with 62 codes. I printed the codes and definitions to see if I would like to consolidate some. Note that I am using some codes to sort profile data like where the co-researcher attended high school, college, where they were born ect. In this way, I am taking full advantage of the power of Atlas.ti. Here is the initial list of codes:

**Advantage Cohort/Peers/Network**  
**Advantage Mentorship/Role Model**
Advice
Attendance Doctorate
Attendance HighSchool
Attendance Masters
Attendance PR
Attendance Undergrad
Born & Raised
Coined Terms
Cultural Barrier- Ethnicity/Racism
cultural barrier- lack role model/mentor
cultural barriers
Cultural Facilitator- Latino Cohort
Cultural Facilitator- Latino Role Models
Cultural Facilitators
Cultural Gender Role Barrier
Degree Type
Dissertation Topic Chosen
Doc Completion Rewards
Doc Consequence
Doc Enrollment Barriers
Doc Experience Described
Doc Process Barrier- Large Student Population
Doc Process Barrier- No Mentor at Institution
Doc Process Barrier- Underprepared
Doc Process Facilitator
Financial Aid
Financial Barriers
Graduation
Making More PR PHDs
Overcoming
Parents Ethnicity
OPENGATE Program
Self-Efficacy
Serendipity
Social Barrier
Social Barrier- Community Disconnect
Social Barrier- Gender
Social Barrier- Social Class
Social Facilitator
Social Facilitator- Becoming Role Model
Social Facilitator- Community Connect
Social Facilitator- Faculty/Institution
Social Facilitator- Social Class
Social Role Balance
Social Role Facilitator- Adult Learner
Social Role Facilitator- Religion/Spiritual
Social Role Facilitators
Social Role Strain- Conflict
Social Role Strain- Contagion
Social Role Strain- Overload
Student
Student, Parent, Worker
Student, Spouse
Student, Worker
Student, Worker, Parent, Daughter
Time Tween Mstrs and Doc
Why Enrolled Doctorate
Years/Length in Doc School

To date I have coded 610 quotes, there are 16 primary documents, and 62 codes. I validated my first code, ensuring that the quotes that were associated with this code were appropriate. I then renamed it. I renamed advantage cohort/peers/network to Social Facilitator- advantage cohort/peers/network. I found renaming the codes and associating codes that I wanted to associate with a different code easy to manipulate.

June 1, 2010- Today I sorted through all of my codes to make sure the quotes labeled under those codes were appropriately placed. This took all day and I did not get to three of the code that were most saturated. First thing to day I will sort through the codes social role balance, social facilitator, and advise. I have 61 or 62 codes under advice alone. This was my most saturated code. Another thing that I did was sort the code families, which I have seven: cultural barriers, cultural facilitators, doctoral experience, social barrier, social facilitator, social role barrier, social role facilitator. The most saturated code family is social facilitator with cumulatively 98 quotes labeled under the codes assigned to this family. It makes sense that facilitator quotes (all of them together) will outnumber the barriers because the co-researchers all were successful in their doctoral endeavors.

Code Families

HU: Puerto Rican PHD Dissertation
File: [C:\Documents and Settings\Doreen\My Documents\Scientific Software...\Puerto Rican PHD Dissertation.hpr6]
Edited by: Super
Date/Time: 06/02/2010 09:30:58 AM

Code Family: Cultural Barriers
Created: 06/01/2010 04:22:11 PM (Super)
Codes (3): [Cultural Barrier- Gender Role] [Cultural Barrier- Lack Role Model/Mentor] [Cultural Barrier- Racism/Ethnic/Lack Community]
Quotation(s): 78

Code Family: Cultural Facilitators
Created: 06/01/2010 04:20:39 PM (Super)
Codes (3): [Cultural Facilitator- Latino Cohort/Community] [Cultural Facilitator- Latino Role Models] [Cultural Facilitators- Serve PRs/Customs]
Quotation(s): 46

Code Family: Doctoral Experience
Created: 06/01/2010 04:25:14 PM (Super)
Codes (7): [Doc Completion Rewards] [Doc Consequence] [Doc Enrollment Barriers- Misc] [Doc Experience Described- Misc] [Doc Process Barrier- Financial/Underprepared] [Doc Process Barrier- Large Student Population] [Doc Process Facilitator- Misc]
Quotation(s): 47

Code Family: Social Barrier
Created: 06/01/2010 04:26:23 PM (Super)
Codes (4): [Social Barrier- 9-11] [Social Barrier- Gender] [Social Barrier- No Mentor] [Social Barrier- Social Class]
Quotation(s): 17

Code Family: Social Facilitator
Created: 06/01/2010 04:26:06 PM (Super)
Codes (6): [Social Facilitator] [Social Facilitator- Becoming Role Model] [Social Facilitator- Cohort/Peers/Network] [Social Facilitator- Faculty/Institution] [Social Facilitator- Mentor/Role Model] [Social Facilitator- Social Class]
Quotation(s): 98

Code Family: Social Role Barrier
Created: 06/01/2010 04:26:53 PM (Super)
Codes (2): [Social Role Barrier- Parents-Low Expect/Lack Ed/Responsibility 4] [Social Role Strain- Strain/Overload/Contagion]
Quotation(s): 59
June 2, 2010- I proof read the quotes to make sure that I coded them properly. I sent Carmeda an e-mail and followed up with a telephone call asking her to be a peer reviewer.

June 5, 2010- I made contact with Carmeda, Arlene, and Christina who have agreed to be peer reviewers. I prepared instructions for the peer review, codes, codes with definitions, the quotes that I extracted for each interview with the codes that I assigned deleted. I e-mailed Carmeda, Arlene, and Christina all of the material, which took all day to prepare (much longer than I thought). I ensured that all of the codes have definitions. I also proof read the quotes for correct assignment again today. I saved my document under another name and trimmed down the codes to a manageable 32. Here they are now:

Cultural Barrier- Gender Role  
Cultural Barrier- Lack Role Model/Mentor  
Cultural Barrier- Racism/Ethnic/Lack Community  
Cultural Facilitator- Latino Cohort/Community  
Cultural Facilitator- Latino Role Models  
Cultural Facilitators- Serve PRs/Food/Music  
Doc Enrollment Barriers- Misc  
Doc Process Barrier- Financial/Underprepared  
Doc Process Barrier- Large Student Population  
Doc Process Facilitator- Misc  
Doctoral Process Barrier- Misc.  
Self-Efficacy  
Social Facilitator- Serendipity  
Social Barrier- 9-11  
Social Barrier- Gender  
Social Barrier- No Mentor  
Social Barrier- Social Class  
Social Facilitator- Becoming Role Model  
Social Facilitator- Cohort/Peers/Network  
Social Facilitator- Faculty/Institution  
Social Facilitator- Mentor/Role Model  
Social Facilitator- Social Class  
Social Facilitator- Sports  
Social Role Balance  
Social Role Barrier- Son/Daughter- Issue w/Parent  
Social Role Barrier- Spouse/Significant Other  
Social Role Facilitator- Adult Learner  
Social Facilitator- Family & Friends  
Social Role Facilitator- Friend  
Social Role Facilitator- Son/Daughter- Parent, High Expect  
Social Role Facilitator- Religion/Spiritual  
Social Role Facilitator- Sibling
Social Role Facilitator- Spouse/Significant Other
Social Role Strain- Strain/Overload/Contagion

Here are the code families:

**Code Families**

Code Family: Cultural Barriers
Created: 06/01/2010 04:22:11 PM (Super)
Codes (3):  [Cultural Barrier- Gender Role]  [Cultural Barrier- Lack Role Model/Mentor]  [Cultural Barrier- Racism/Ethnic/Lack Community]
Quotation(s): 78

Code Family: Cultural Facilitators
Created: 06/01/2010 04:20:39 PM (Super)
Codes (3):  [Cultural Facilitator- Latino Cohort/Community]  [Cultural Facilitator-Latino Role Models]  [Cultural Facilitators- Serve PRs/Food/Music]
Quotation(s): 53

Code Family: Doctoral Experience
Created: 06/01/2010 04:25:14 PM (Super)
Quotation(s): 31

Code Family: Social Barrier
Created: 06/01/2010 04:26:23 PM (Super)
Codes (4):  [Social Barrier- 9-11]  [Social Barrier- Gender]  [Social Barrier- No Mentor]  [Social Barrier- Social Class]
Quotation(s): 15

Code Family: Social Facilitator
Created: 06/01/2010 04:26:06 PM (Super)
Codes (6):  [Social Facilitator- Becoming Role Model]  [Social Facilitator-Cohort/Peers/Network]  [Social Facilitator- Faculty/Institution]  [Social Facilitator-Mentor/Role Model]  [Social Facilitator- Social Class]  [Social Facilitator- Sports]
Quotation(s): 58
Code Family: Social Role Barrier
Created: 06/01/2010 04:26:53 PM (Super)
Codes (2):  [Social Role Barrier- Son/Daughter- Issue w/Parent]  [Social Role Strain-Strain/Overload/Contagion]
Quotation(s): 61

Code Family: Social Role Facilitator
Created: 06/01/2010 04:26:40 PM (Super)
Codes (5):  [Social Role Balance]  [Social Role Facilitator- Adult Learner]  [Social Role Facilitator- Religion/Spiritual]  [Social Role Facilitator- Sibling]  [Social Role Facilitator- Spouse/Significant Other]
Quotation(s): 44

Interesting:

The total number of social barrier references (76) is less than the references to social facilitators (102). There were more cultural barriers was more (78) than the cultural facilitators (53) mentioned. In sum, the total number of barriers were nearly equal (154) to the number of facilitators mentioned (155). It appears that the social facilitators created a balance for the total number of barriers, which there was nearly an equal balance between social (76) and cultural barriers (78).

Social barriers (including social roles)- 76
Social facilitators (including social roles)- 102
Cultural barriers- 78
Cultural facilitators- 53

June 8, 2010- Met with Dr. Janesick for lunch to discuss my findings, and my methods so far. She said that it was ok to drop my pilot participant and not to mention the source of my questions for protocol two. I got great positive feedback. She suggested that I following Carol Berg’s lead on presenting the participants as case studies.

June 11, 2010- I met with Dr. Young and his wife for dinner. I went over my findings and my plans for analysis and write up. Dr. Young said that doing the directed research with Dr. Clara with an Adult Learning and Development would meet program requirements. So I will get that arranged and confirmed this weekend/coming week. Everything looks good for a December graduation.

June 26, 2010- I started to write chapter 4 starting with the vignettes, viewing the pictures that I took to help jog my memory and inspire my writing.
June 27, 2010- I continued to fill in the vignettes. I am starting to organize a strategy for writing the rest of chapter four including plans for the photo journal that I would like to create.

July 3, 2010- Sent e-mails to Carmeda, Christina, and Arlene requesting a status check on the peer review. I made initial contact with the peer reviewers on June 5 and sent the materials that they needed to analyze either that day or the day after.

July 7, 2010- I saw Carmeda at the July 2010 ETD workshop. She assured me that her part of the analysis would be done by this weekend.

July 10, 2010- Worked on revising Chapter 3.

July 11, 2010- I completed revising Chapter 3. I may have to proof read and revise further once I write Chapter 4.

July 13, 2010- Peer Reviewer Christina e-mailed me and said that she will be unable to be a peer reviewer.

July 16, 2010- Met with Peer Reviewer Carmeda Stokes who turned over copies of the transcripts that she Peer Reviewed along with her comments. I called and left a message for Peer Reviewer Arlene to see if she could review the transcripts that Christina was unable to review.

July 17 & 18, 2010- Continued to work revise chapter 3, started drafting chapter 4. Added info about Gotham, OPENGATE, and Boricua Center, revised participants profile tables. E-mailed Martha Baker, looked up Celeste Fenton’s telephone number, and called Emmanuel Jean Francois, to see if I could replace Christina and Arlene. P.S. Arlene e-mailed me On July 16 and said that she had a death in the family and did not know when she would return to the US. She said nothing about the peer review, so I took that to mean that she couldn’t do it. I met with Carmeda on July 16 and picked up her peer reviewed material. I couldn’t thank her enough for being so loyal!

July 23, 2010- Both Martha and Emmanuel have agreed to help with the peer review. I sent them both the copies of the instructions, codes, excerpts, and transcripts that they needed to analyze. I took today off to work on Chapter 4. I revised what I had for chapter four. I reanalyzed my codes to establish four major themes of the perceptions of doctoral attainment for a group of Puerto Ricans: culture component, social component, social role component, the self as a component. I also collapsed the code doc process barrier-large student population and placed these items under social barrier-institutional/faculty. I renamed the codes labeled doc process barrier or facilitator to something more specific to what I was identifying. I determined that the items identified under these codes all had to do with the self, either internally or externally, which is what was creating the process barrier or facilitator. The codes related to the self were placed into a code family which
subsumed 4 codes and a total 45 quotes. All of the participants contributed at least one code to this family. Given that there were a total of 45 codes, I felt that that making this code family a component of the doctoral process perception was justified. I also added another cultural facilitator- institution culturally accepting, meaning accepting or at least tolerant of people of other races, ethnicities, cultures, or regional origin.

July 30-August 13, 2010- I took approximately two weeks off of work and completed chapter 4 on August 13, 2010.

August 17, 2010- I received Martha’s peer review packet.

August 14-August 18, 2010- I started writing chapter 5 on August 14 and I finished chapter 5 on August 18, 2010 at 8:45. I finished writing chapters 4 and 5 in approximately two weeks by working from 8 to 14 hours per day.

August 25, 2010- I received Emmanuel’s peer review form.

August 21, 22, 28, 29, 2010- I began to edit all 5 chapters of the dissertation. I changed the category labeled The Self to Personal Factors after seeing the component “Personal Factors” used in an article that I reviewed for my literature review.

September 4, 5, 6, 2010- I continued to edit the dissertation, I added the appendices, and added evidence of the triangulated data.

September 6, 2010- I submitted the first draft of the final dissertation to Dr. Janesick for feedback.

October 7, 2010- I successfully defended my dissertation.

October 23, 24, 30, 31- Worked on Correcting Dissertation, approximately 32 hours

November 6 & 7- Worked on Correcting Dissertation, 8 hours, and uploaded ETD

December 11, 2010- I graduated.
Appendix L: Evidence of Data Triangulation

Graciella: *College as a way out of poverty*
A book written by Graciella and Angelica about their educational experiences

Angelica: *The strain of motherhood, as a Puerto Rican, on pursuing a doctorate*
A book written by Graciella and Angelica about their educational experiences

Lissette: *Lissette’s interest in her research topic, Hip Hop and Rap Music*
A book written by Lissette about her Hip Hop and Rap music research

Hector: *Internal locus of control and the philosophy of Albert Ellis*
Books by Albert Ellis the Practice of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, How to Control Your Anger Before It Controls You, and A New Guide to Rational Living
Article the Social Learning Theory of Julian B. Rotter

Marisol: *The educational tracking of Puerto Ricans*
Book Puerto Ricans Born in the U.S.A. by Clara E. Rodriguez

Miguel: *The impact of poor institutional fit*
Articles written by Tinto, Bean, and Noel regarding institutional fit and student persistence and departure (see literature review)

Yvette: *GOTHAM’s struggle with open access admissions, tuition increases, and standardized testing*
Three articles about Gotham’s struggle with open access, tuition, and standardized tests

Victor: *The impact of September 11, 2001 at BMCC*
Article about the impact of September 11, 2001 at BMCC
Appendix M: Cost of Living Index

In another section of this dissertation, I indicated that the approximate cumulative cost to conduct this study was $15,000. I have placed this Cost of Living Index here in order to memorialize the cost of common items as of this writing, October 30, 2010, and to give the reader perspective as to the meaning of what it cost me to conduct this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallon of Gas</td>
<td>$2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallon of Milk</td>
<td>$3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 Square Foot Home (new build, not custom, Tampa, Fla.)</td>
<td>$225,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chevrolet Car (compact, base price)</td>
<td>$12,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Wage, Florida</td>
<td>$7.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix N: Sample Journal Entry- The Memorial Day Ephiphany

May 30, 2010- Here I am. It is the Memorial Day weekend holiday. I would have had Monday off as a holiday and I took Tuesday and Wednesday off to complete the bulk of the analysis. I am a little ahead regarding the analysis of the transcripts. All I have left to analyze from the first round of interviews is Hector’s transcript, but his interview was short. Hopefully, if I can power thru, I will be able to analyze Hector’s interview one, and Graciella and Angelica’s interview two, if not one more. In short if I can analyze four transcripts today and four tomorrow, I can do some creative analysis on Tuesday and Wednesday, sorting, writing the co-researcher profiles and my reflections of the meetings. It’s a lot now that I see the list on paper, but we will see.

It is now 8:49 pm. I think I started working at about 8:00 am. Not that I didn’t take plenty of breaks. I also took a late nap. I seem to require a lot of naps lately. This has been an emotional process for me. Sometimes I cry when I do my analysis. So many things are becoming clear. I am much more aware of things now. Yet I feel prepared to handle just about anything. My level of confidence is growing. I also feel that I am on to something with this document. That what I have found is exciting and revealing and that the world will be as interested as I am when I am done. I want this paper to be infused with art and emotion, because I do feel that writing is an artistic expression, a revealing artistic expression. The pictures that I took during the process will support this. Moments frozen in time, captured moments, my perspective represented by light. I haven’t even started any Photoshop work, painting with light. Painting with light. A soundless, silent
representation of my experience. A dimension of it. Painting a representation of
experience with light. Now to synthesize it all.

I think the analysis is an emotional experience for me because of what my co-
researchers have told me. What has been captured by the transcripts, validates my
experiences, with racism, with tokenism, with isolation, because others have experienced
the same things. It wasn’t just me. I wasn’t just being “sensitive”. You know, what
people call you when they want to minimize your experiences and not do anything about
your complaints. Sensitive is what you are called when people want to blame you for
what they are doing to you, for what they have done, so that they can keep doing what
they are doing, and in an effort to get you to validate their behavior. Sensitive? No!
Aware? Yes.

**May 31, 2010**- Today is Memorial Day and I am sitting behind this computer. It is 10:15
am. I’m starting late because I went to bed extremely late, at about 2 am, but I got a lot
accomplished. After signing off the computer at about 9 pm yesterday, I reread Dr.
Janesick’s “Stretching Exercises for Qualitative Researchers”. I found rereading the
book, for the I don’t know how times now, extremely helpful. I found rereading the book
helped me to organize my thoughts and plans for the rest of the analysis of this document.
The reading helped put words to my thoughts. Proper words. Acceptable words to my
thoughts that will soon turn to action. I also feel empowered to create, to work with my
intuition and to not be afraid to acknowledge serendipitous events. All the things that
Janesick has said in the past, and some things were irksome, are starting to crystallize.
The more I read her book, the more it makes sense, and the more what I’m doing makes
sense, so I’m going to jot down some things to reinforce what I read last night, prior to me starting to code the last four transcripts of this dissertation.

Pg. 11- The qualitative researcher is involved in this artistic activity because he or she must describe and explain the lived experience of participants in his or her study.

Pg. 86- Every attempt is made to look for critical incidents, points of tension and conflict, and contradictions to help in the purpose of the study.

Look for major themes, key words, indexes of behavior and belief to make an initial list of major and minor categories.

Pg. 106- …look for ways to compliment and extend the description and explanation of the project by using multiple methods and sources…(reworded by me, Janesick words are in bold)…such as participant observation, interviews, documents, and the researcher’s personal reflections.

Pg. 107 …Qualitative researchers embrace subjectivity…Without understanding where one is situated in the research act, it is impossible to claim consciousness and impossible to interpret one’s data fully. Meaning is constructed in the ongoing social relationship between the researcher and the participants.

Pg. 108- …The qualitative researcher often stumbles onto something in the course of a research project that leads to a rich course of inquiry and was unplanned in the original design of the study…The qualitative researcher should expect to uncover some information through informed hunches, intuition, and serendipitous occurrences that, in turn, will lead to richer and more powerful explanation of the setting, context, and participants in any given study.
Pg. 112- In dance, the pas de deux is designed for two dancers, with the idea that they are more as one. They are totally connected to the final product.

Pg 116- Intuition is connected to creativity, for intuition is the seed, so to speak, of the creative act.

Pg 123- Be sure to use abundant sections from your transcripts…Be sure to include a visual schema of all your original categories and then the final distilled few.

Pg. 118- Develop a model of what occurred in your study.

As I reread Dr. Janesick’s book, now that I have collected and began to form the original categories for this dissertation, my research question began to crystallize. What are the components of their perceptions? The components started to become clear, more after the second round of questioning. Where I set out to explore one component, the balance or strain of social roles while pursuing a doctorate, other unexpected components emerged such as the role of social class, racism, cultural conditioning, the social construction of race, mentorship, the need to for role models, and the role of ethnic identity. All of these other components surfaced unexpectedly. Could it be because I was interviewing people with doctorates? These co-researchers are educated to the extent that they can describe their experiences clearly, with the articulate precision expected of scholars. In terms of explaining the setting, context, and co-researchers who participated in this study, my explication of the context for which they lived during their doctoral experiences will be all the more powerful because the co-researchers themselves are adept at describing their memories. What is even more powerful was their ability to describe the social context that they experienced up to the point that they decided to
pursue the PHD? And how, as one co-participant put it, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Which brings me to my last comment before I start on my transcripts; the concept of time for the doctoral experience does not begin and end with enrollment and graduation. I would argue that the doctoral experience started before that. Part of the doctoral experience is how the individual gets there and when because in my opinion, those experiences play a part in the actual doctoral process. After all, we all must live with our memories, our baggage. Don’t our prior experiences have an impact on our current perceptions? And does the doctoral experience really end after we graduate, or does it continue on? Does the story really ever end, or does it go on so long as we remember it? These are temporal issues; when does a thing end and when does it begin? Serendipity- the faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for.

It is now 3:12 pm- I have completed coding all 16 transcripts and that included a two hour nap. The second round of transcripts was much easier to code because most of the categories were formed, few needed to be added, and the responses were for the most part redundant. The challenge was that I now have 62 codes, so it was difficult to remember the definitions that I assigned to them. Now I have to go through the process of checking the definitions of the codes to see if I want to consolidate any prior to making sure that I place the quotes in the appropriate category. This is the fun part. This is the part where I get to become more familiar with the power of Atlas.ti. (see Audit Trail)
About the Author

Doreen Rivera Rapp is a Nuyor-Floridian who was born and raised in New York where she obtained an Associate’s Degree in Liberal Arts from Nassau Community College. She migrated to Florida with her family in 1986 and earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Criminology and a Master’s Degree in Adult Education from the University of South Florida. She has served in the field of law enforcement for the past 20 years, three and a half years as a probation officer and 16 1/2 years in a sworn law enforcement capacity. In 2008, she presented her paper, *Is Law Enforcement a Profession*, at the AAACE conference and co-authored the article *Journey to the Centre of the Graduate Experience*, with Christy Rhodes and Carmeda Stokes, in the peer reviewed journal *Adult Learning*. 