6-2014

From the BX to a BA: Latino Male Students and the Transition from High School to College

Alejandro Eduardo Carrion

Graduate Center, City University of New York

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds

Part of the Higher Education Administration Commons, Higher Education and Teaching Commons, Latin American Languages and Societies Commons, and the Latin American Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

Carrion, Alejandro Eduardo, "From the BX to a BA: Latino Male Students and the Transition from High School to College" (2014). CUNY Academic Works.
https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/184

This Dissertation is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact deposit@gc.cuny.edu.
From the BX to a BA:
Latino Male Students and the Transition from High School to College.

by
Alejandro Eduardo Carrión
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
April 23, 2014

Dr. Ofelia García

5/1/14
Date
Chair of Examining Committee

Dr. Anthony G. Picciano

5/1/14
Date
Executive Officer

Dr. Anthony G. Picciano

Dr. Nicholas Michelli

Dr. Anthony De Jesús
Supervisory Committee
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

From the BX to a BA:

Latino Male Students and the Transition from High School to College.

By

Alejandro Eduardo Carrión

Adviser: Dr. Ofelia García

This study aims to provide a counter narrative to the deficit filled discourse surrounding Latino males by informing teachers, policymakers and researchers of the barriers and resources encountered by this population as they make the transition from high school to college. A qualitative research design was utilized for this study, which focused on 10 Latino males who mainly identified as Puerto Rican and Dominican, from the Bronx. Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice, and his theoretical tools of field (structures), habitus (dispositions) and capital (social, cultural and economic), was used as the theoretical framework guiding this study. Participants shared the nuances of the college transition, which required them to negotiate various fields. Their interactions with the fields of the Bronx, school, and family provided messages and capital concerning college that either aligned or detoured their habitus toward college. These fields, at times, created “physical barriers” to accessing college such a lack of financial aid and inadequate schooling. But the fields also provided a layer of barriers which lived in the discourse and messages they received about college. This discourse informed the students’ habitus which constructed a “college imagination” that perceived institutions of higher education as a dark, lonely
place where no one would care for them. Moreover students discussed how teachers tried
to “scare them straight” with a “caring” discourse that attempted to align their academic
actions and behaviors towards what teachers envisioned as more appropriate for college
“survival” and “success”. Many of the participants were able to navigate issues around
masculinity and academic unpreparedness to “successfully” transition to college by
leaning on the support they received from their peers, college counselors, and their
mothers. Ultimately the majority of the participants were able to navigate the college
transitions through their habitus, which was aligned to interpreting college as a natural
step in their life’s journey.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has truly been a long, trying and difficult journey. There were definitely times when I felt I did not belong, became frustrated with my “lack of progress” and wanted to give up. But the people around me were a constant reminder of why I began this journey and have provided me with the love and support to successfully complete it.

First I would like to thank Dr. Ofelia García for literally walking into my life and agreeing to take me on during one of the most trying periods of my life. After our initial meeting you told me, “don’t worry Alejandro, now you are one of my students”. At the time, I did not know that meant, but after completing this journey with you, I now know. Your loving guidance and support was what I needed. Thank you for challenging me to be a better scholar for the Latino community and your constant check-in’s, no matter where you were in the world. I hope I continue to make you proud.

I was also fortunate to have many Faculty mentors throughout this process. Dr. Jean Anyon, though you are not with us anymore, I would like to thank you for mentoring me from the first day I walked into the GC. I remember when I received your personal call stating that I was accepted to the Urban Education Program. I could not control myself. You instilled in me the love for theory, and through your mentorship I was able to witness first hand its power. I miss you and wish you were at my defense. I know you were watching. I hope I made you proud and to continue your legacy. To Dr. Michelle Fine, your eloquent words stuck with me throughout my process and your assurance that my voice and stance were necessary for the academy motivated me to stay. Thank you. Dr. Lisa (Leigh) Patel, you helped me process Bourdieu in ways I couldn’t
Imagine. Your constant assurance that “I was on the right track” helped me when I felt my wheels were just spinning. Thank you. To Dr. Anthony Picciano, thank you for your guidance. Your feedback on my dissertation was very helpful, and you have given me ideas to carry with me as I move on to my next phase. I hope you are able to sleep better now knowing I am all right. Please make sure you extend the same confidence you had in me to other students in similar situations. Sometimes we just need an extra chance. Dr. Nicholas Michelli, you stepped in at the last moment to guide me to completion. Thank you for doing so and I look forward to having more conversations in the future. Dr. Anthony De Jesús, you introduced me to the world of academia and doctoral studies long ago. Those trips to Harvard had a real influence in my decision to pursue my PhD. Thank you for always pushing me to go deeper with my analysis, for being there when I needed help or advice, and for opening your house to me during the coding process. I look forward to collaborating with you in the future as colleagues. To Dr. Madeline Pérez, from Greenlining, to the GC, to Scholars Retreat you have always shared your resources which have made me a better person and scholar. Thank you for all your guidance and support. Dr. Martin Ruck we began this journey together and you placed me on a solid path and for that I am grateful. To Christine Saieh, thank you for always looking out for me, providing me with medicine when I was sick, and giving me big hugs every time you saw me. I promise I will visit often.

To my GC friends, what can I say. Just like the participants in my study, your support means everything to me. I’m going to miss our lunches, study groups, conversations and laughter as students but look forward to what the future holds for all of us as scholars. Thank you Edwin Mayorga for our deep discussions and for always being
there when I needed you. I’m going to have to visit you often while you are down in
Philadelphia so we can have lunch together. I am glad to consider you part of my
familia. To Dr. Liza Pappas, you had from “what up kid”. It is possible for Yankee and
Red Sox’s fans to do great work together! Boooouurdiieuuu. Dr. Haiwen Chu, your jokes
always make me laugh and your brilliance makes me go, wow. Roberto Martinez, you are
a great ambassador for the Latino community through your caring voice. I’m going to
miss our working sessions, but I look forward to our collaborations. Dr. Nelson Flores,
thank you for your support. Because of your insistence, foresight and good word,
Ofelia became my advisor. I owe you. To the previous generation of GC students who took me
in when I arrived. Thank you for paving the way and leaving a lasting legacy. Your work
and success inspires me.

During this journey I met numerous people outside of the Graduate Center whose
impact was equality as important. They had a lasting influence on me and I am glad we
crossed paths. Dr. Sonja Foss and Dr. William Waters your writing retreats were
everything. I look forward to them every summer. Daniel Voloch, you gave me my first
job working with young men at Hostos Community College which was the foundation of
my work, thank you. Daniel Jackson, I miss working with you. We were a great team! I
am proud to call you my friend. Elizabeth Wilson and the staff at the Hostos Community
College CN program, thank you for all your support. My BOND boys! I knew you when
you were just teenagers and now you are all men. I hope I had as much of an impact on
your lives as you all had on mine. I look forward to many more years of friendship. To
my students at Brooklyn College and Hostos Community College, you inspire me
everyday. I cherish our conversations and thank you for always putting a smile on my
face. To The Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Department at Brooklyn College, thank you for making me feel welcomed from day one. To my Binghamton friends, thank you for the many years of friendship and support. We have always been there for each other and I look forward to sharing many more life experiences with you.

Also I would like to acknowledge and thank the following people, groups and organizations. The Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, NYC Latino Scholars group, The CUNY Black Male Initiative, Let’s Get Ready, College Access and Success Program, College Focus Program, The American Association of Hispanics in Higher Educations, Ricardo Gabriel, Blanca E. Vega, Dr. Mellie Torres, Dr. Ivelys Figueroa, Dr. Joseph Nelson, Dr. Kiersten Greene, Dr. Patricia Krueger-Henney, Jeremy Greenfield, José Alfredo Menjivar Ortez, Dr. Garth D. Stahl, Julian Woodard, Damon E. Luke, Cohort 5, Dr. Bree Picower, and Dr. Rosa Rivera-McCutchen.

Finally I would like to recognize my family. Mom, Anna Carrión and Dad, Victor Carrión. You have always supported me unconditionally when others did not. You instilled in me hard work, dedication and a passion for helping others. Mom, thank you for your loving support and care. I know you are proud of your boy. I think this trumps the master’s degree I promised you. Dad, our long conversations on the phone have always lifted my spirits. You have always been there for me when I needed you the most. From little league to academia, both of you are always in my corner. To my parents’ partners, Rosie and Charles, thank you for loving my parents and supporting me. To my other family members, my sister Michele, my aunt’s and uncles and my cousins, thank you for your love and support. I know I can count on you no matter what. To Erin Garcia, you entered my life half way through the process but have supported me wholeheartedly.
Thank you for your patience and understanding. This process was tough on both of us, but we made it! To my late night study buddy, Luna. Thank you for taking long walks with me when I needed to clear my head and for always providing an ear for my thoughts. I know you can’t speak, but you understand.

This study could have not been possible if it weren’t for the ten young men who volunteered to participate. Thank you for your openness and candidness. Though I cannot mention you by name you know who you are. Your voices made the Bronx proud and your words will have an impact on future generations. I hope I represented you well. Even though the study is over, I look forward to continuing our relationships for years to come.

To all those I did not mention in my acknowledgments, thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are not forgotten.

¡PALANTE, SIEMPRE PALANTE!

Alejandro Eduardo Carrión

April 24, 2014
# Table of Content

Chapter One - The Study

**Introduction**  ........................................................................................................1
**Statement of Problem**  ............................................................................................5
**Research Question**  .................................................................................................7

Chapter Two- Review of literature and Theoretical Framework

**Introduction**  ...........................................................................................................8
**Latinos**  ..................................................................................................................8
  *Latino History*  ................................................................. 8
  *Migration and History of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans*  ........11
  *Education of Latino*  .................................................................15
  *Puerto Rican Education*  ............................................................18
  *Dominican Education*  .................................................................24
**Masculinity and Latinos**  .......................................................................................28
* Machismo  ................................................................. 29
**Theoretical Framework**  .........................................................................................36
**Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice**  ..............................................................................36
  *Capital*  ................................................................................................................38
    *Economic Capital*  ............................................................................................38
    *Cultural Capital*  .............................................................................................42
    *Social Capital*  .................................................................................................47
**Bourdieu’s Concept of Capital and my Dissertation**  ...........................................54
**Habitus**  ...............................................................................................................54
  *Coping*  ..............................................................................................................57
  *Resistance*  ........................................................................................................59
  *College Choice*  ................................................................................................60
**Bourdieu’s Concept of Habitus and my Dissertation**  .........................................63
**Field**  ...................................................................................................................64

Chapter Three - Research Methodology

**Introduction**  ...........................................................................................................74
**Research Design**  .................................................................................................74
  *Sample*  ...............................................................................................................75
    *Role of Researcher*  ........................................................................................78
    *Thematic Analysis*  ........................................................................................80
    *Reviewing Themes*  ........................................................................................82
**Limitations**  ...........................................................................................................83
**Reflexivity**  ...........................................................................................................84
**Validity**  .................................................................................................................85
**Ethical Issues**  .......................................................................................................85
Significance of Study ................................................................. 86

Chapter Four- The Students

Demographics ........................................................................... 88
Marvin the Jokester ................................................................. 91
Nelson the talented Singer ..................................................... 92
Fernando the quite musical “Genius” ....................................... 96
Antonio the student with potential ......................................... 98
Diego the secret agent ............................................................ 101
Pablo and his senioritis ......................................................... 104
Kevin the valedictorian ......................................................... 107
David the family trailblazer ................................................... 108
Daniel the aspiring teacher ................................................... 110
Manolo the overanxious planner ........................................... 113
Conclusion .............................................................................. 116

Chapter Five- The Bronx

The Bronx Beginnings ............................................................ 117
The Bronx Today ..................................................................... 118

Daniel: The Bronx and impetus to resist ................................. 119
Kevin: Pride in resisting the Bronx ......................................... 122
Marvin and David: Resisting the Bronx after
Washington Heights and Honduras ...................................... 124
Conclusion .............................................................................. 125

Chapter Six- Family

Family creating Doubt and Anger .......................................... 127

Expectations related to birth order: Diego and Daniel .......... 128
Expectations related to others in family: Kevin ...................... 131
Family taking credit and creating anger: Manolo ................. 132

Expectations too little, too late: Nelson ................................. 135
Family’s warning about college as a dark, lonely, and
dangerous place ...................................................................... 138
The Family’s message about the importance of going to college .... 139

David wanting better for his family ....................................... 139
Pablo’s Mother and Brother Paving the Way ........................ 144
Marvin’s Mom and her Early influence in
Shaping his Aspirations ....................................................... 148
Diego’s Family as a Resource and
Their Words of Caution ....................................................... 151
Daniel Following in his Families Footsteps .......................... 153
The Gentle Ease of Kevin’s Mom .......................................... 156
Conclusion .............................................................................. 159
Chapter Seven - School

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 163
Familiarization with College without College Preparation:
Daniel and Nelson's story .......................................................................................... 164
  Pushed to Graduation in an all male school:
    Daniel’s Story ........................................................................................................ 164
  Graduation, but not preparation: Nelson’s Story ...................................................... 168
Being Male in School .................................................................................................... 169
  Being male in a closing school: Manolo’s Story ...................................................... 169
  Gender and smartness: Diego’s view on teacher’s preferences ................................. 171
  Being male in an all Boys’ School: Daniel ............................................................... 172
  David and males as Clowns ..................................................................................... 172
  Males don’t care and teachers don’t care about males: Kevin’s view ...................... 172
  Teachers don’t like guys: Marvin ........................................................................... 174
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 175

Chapter Eight – The Effects of School

Same School Different Realities .................................................................................. 177
  Health Academy: Shallow but differential role ...................................................... 177
  Poet High School ..................................................................................................... 184
  Singer High School .................................................................................................. 190
  Finding resources at a closing school: Manolo ....................................................... 197

Chapter Nine – Discursive barriers and Resources in Schools: Teachers as Capital?

Discursive Barriers and Resources .............................................................................. 203
  Teachers in school: Shallow and impersonal messages ........................................ 203
  Teachers and school personnel: Messages of “Scaring Students Straight” and creating doubt ................................................................. 207
The effect of shallow and scary messages:
  Self-doubt, fear and imagination ............................................................................. 213
  The role of college advisors and few others. Exceptions ........................................ 217
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 219

Chapter Ten- Discursive Barriers and Resources in Schools: Peers as Capital

Peers embedded in a college-going culture ............................................................... 220
Peers’ discourse as college resource ......................................................................... 222
Peers as informants .................................................................................................... 227
Peers as a source of comfort and advice ..................................................................... 231
  Making decisions in isolation ................................................................................... 234
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 236

Chapter Eleven- Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion and Recommendations .............................................................................. 238

References ..................................................................................................................... 260
Chapter One
Introduction

This dissertation project is a culmination of work, inquiry and conjecture. It has been under construction for some time and has taken many years to complete. The scope of the project and breadth of the project took some time to formulate, but the seeds were planted my final semester of graduate studies at the CUNY Hunter College. I was completing my masters program and felt as if I had not exerted myself to my full potential. A colleague and friend who was a researcher at Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College challenged me to come up with an original research project and write a thesis prior to graduation even though it was not a requirement. As I sat in an educational policy course trying to figure out the scope of my project it dawned on me. I began to look around the classroom and realized that I was the only male of color, but more specifically, Latino male within the classroom. As I continued to think about all the classes I took while I was a graduate student at Hunter I began to realize that this was a trend in almost all my classes. I could count on my hands how many males of color, specifically Latino males who were enrolled in my courses. As Creswell (2007) states “qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). This moment of realization was my “epiphany” moment.

The result of this effort was a graduate thesis titled “No One Looks Like Me: An Ethnographic Study of Puerto Ricans Males and College.” In this study I was able to interview six Puerto Rican Males, three of whom were college graduates and three who were not, in an effort to better understand how their educational pathways were developed. One of the results of this project was the conceptualization and value of a high
school diploma and college degree, and what opportunities these credentials provided. For those who had obtained these credentials of institutionalized capital, the college graduates saw the possession of these degrees as a necessity for their life goals and viewed both the high school diploma and college degree as just a bridge to their eventual goal. For the non-graduates, they viewed the possessions of these credentials as a sole means to economic capital. For the non-graduates the differences between a high school diploma and college degree was viewed as barriers or resources to further economic success. This project played several roles for me at the time. It challenged me as a student to go beyond what was required and to really dig deep into various social issues which not only impacted myself but my community. Secondly this project precipitated an interest in academic research which has guided this dissertation project and my work until this day.

In 2003, before President Obama “My Brother’s Keeper” Initiative, before New York City’s former Mayor Bloomberg’s Young Men’s Initiative, prior to the CUNY Black Male Initiative, before the discourse of addressing the issues facing young men of color in this country became part of the mainstreams growing conscious, my interest in working with the population had already been planted and I was well on my way to “studying” this phenomenon. In part I became interested in this area of interest because of the clear lack of representation of young men of color throughout my educational career. I wanted to understand why young men were not going to college, but also it gave me a chance to reflect upon my own educational journey, the “decisions” I made, barriers and resources I encountered. Another reason why I became so passionate about this work was fueled by the anger and frustration which began to build as I conducted more and
more research. When I first began this journey it became evident to me that this issue was not receiving much attention in academia. What little research was being conducted on this population came from a very deficit orientated model. My story, and the lived experience of many students in New York City and the Bronx, were not represented in the literature. In my work I sought to address these deficiencies in the literature. From the first day of being admitted to the Ph.D. Program in Urban Education I committed to highlighting what was going on in these communities.

Though the focus of my dissertation project has changed in scope throughout the years of graduate work, in essence it is still the same project. The goal of this study is to provide insight into what accessing college means for a young Latino male growing up in New York City, but more specifically the Bronx. Current research on this phenomenon attempts to frame this engagement or transition through the lens of a specific theory or reality. Focusing on the lack of social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, poor schools, inadequate teachers or environmental factors, these reports discuss the lack of access from a narrow perspective. Though these factors may be a barrier to accessing college, there may be more underlying barriers which are not discussed.

My contention in this dissertation project, and in my overall work, is that students deal with many barriers and access multiple resources during their transition. Whether you are a higher achieving student, or a student grappling with academic progress, each student will face multiple barriers or resources during their educational journeys. Each student will deal with barriers and resources differently depending on multiple factors such as their schooling experience, support from their families and peers, and their imagination of college. Students will encounter multiple structural barriers as well as

---

1 These studies will be discussed further in the literature review
individual barriers, which they will have to negotiate in their attempt to access college. Also each student will utilize resources which have been established around them, but others will create resources from personal relationships or based upon their creativity. This dissertation project will discuss the barriers and resources ten young Latino Males from the Bronx encountered during their journeys. Some of these barriers and resources have already been established by previous research, and this study will help to affirm these studies. But because of the theoretical framework used in the study — Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (1990; 1992)— I uncover other barriers and resources that have received little to no attention thus far. These barriers and resources are both structural and personal. Although they have caused some impediments for the Latino males in my study, they have also assisted them in their journeys. The students in this study were all attending College Awareness programs, and all but one were accepted to college. In some ways they were “successful” students, although their pathways were not as smooth as some may envision. These “successful” students faced many barriers, and also accessed multiple resources which helped all but one make the transition from high school to college.

In presenting and discussing the nuanced journeys of the students in this study utilizing Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of Practice, this dissertation hopes to contest current “silver bullet” discourse which frames the success, pathways and journeys of students of color as a one issue phenomenon. The transition from high school to college is complex. Students make multiple decisions and negotiate numerous fields. In order to fully comprehend the transition to college for Latino males we must first begin by
understanding the complex, nuanced, and sometimes treacherous choreography between the barriers and resources they face.

**Statement of Problem**

Latina/os are currently the fastest growing population in the United States. It is expected that by 2025, one fourth of all U.S. public school students will be Latina/o (Gregory, 2003; Zalaquett, 2005) and by 2050 more than one third of the overall population will be Latina/o (Lane, 2001; Zalaquett, 2005). As Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) state in a recent U.S. Census Bureau (2006b) report, between 2000 and 2006, Latinos accounted for one half of the nation’s growth, and their growth rate, 24%, was more than four times the growth rate of the total U.S. population, which was at 6%. Latinos are growing more rapidly than any other segment of the United States population.

Although Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic population, they are the least represented in higher education. While Latinas/os comprise 16% of the nation’s population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), they continue to earn a small share of all Associate’s degrees (12%), Bachelor’s degrees (8%), Master’s degrees (6%) and Doctoral degrees (4%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Also coupled with the low enrollment rate is a noticeable gender difference between Latino males and females. Latino males are underrepresented on college campuses and in college classrooms across the country (Fry, 2002; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). While Latinos are growing as a population, their educational progression and completion rates in higher education, specifically for males, are not keeping pace with this growth. This holds true nationally as well as locally here in New York City.
The City University of New York’s higher educational system has a diverse student body. During the Fall semester of 2012 the City University of New York (CUNY) student body was composed of a population that was 28.7% White. Blacks made up 25% of the population and Hispanics/Latinos made up 27% of the total population.² At first glance these statistics may suggest that CUNY is doing a good job at recruiting young students of color. This may be true, but this may not be the case for young men of color. Throughout CUNY only 9.3% of the total population identify themselves as Black males, and 11% identify themselves as Hispanic males.³ These numbers become even more disparaging when you consider where males of color are enrolled. For both black and Latino males, the large concentration of them are enrolled in community colleges with 11.4% and 15.6% identifying as Black and Latino respectively. At the senior colleges, Blacks make up only 8.5% and Latinos 8.2% of the population.

CUNY’s lack of enrollment of young men of color, specifically Latino males, mirrors national enrollment numbers. Males of color are not accessing higher education at the same rates as their female counterparts, nor as their white peers. It is important for us, as citizens and scholars, to determine how we can best assist and support Latino students, specifically males, as they attempt to access, persist and graduate from college. This is an issue which has been gaining more attention and momentum in recent years, but there is still more work to be done. My research will attempt to shed more light on this issue.

² CUNY office of research and assessment Fall 2012
³ CUNY office of research and assessment Fall 2012
**Research Question**

The majority of research studies to date have focused on structural barriers to higher education for Latino students, but rarely have students themselves, and especially Latino males, discussed the barriers and resources they face and the ways in which they negotiate them. This is the focus of my research question:

- *What barriers and resources do Latino high school male students encounter and negotiate as they transition from high school to college?*

In the next chapter I review the literature pertinent to this dissertation and explain the theoretical framework that I will utilize to find answers to my research question.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I start by defining the term Latino, tracing the history of Latinos in the US, and reviewing the literature on Latinos’ educational experience, specifically that of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. This section is included in the dissertation to provide the deeper context of what is meant by Latino as a homogenous construct, and some of the differences of each ethnic group within the Latino population. Special attention will be paid to Puerto Rican and Dominican students because these are the two largest Latino ethnic groups in New York City and constitute the majority of my sample.

The second part of this chapter presents the theoretical framework for this dissertation — that of Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice. This theory provides the theoretical understandings that I then use to study the ways in which Latino high school males in the Bronx negotiate barriers and resources as they make the transition to college.

Latinos

The word Latino, Hispanic, or even Spanish has been used interchangeably to describe a certain segment of the population with Latin American and Caribbean origin (Cobas, Duany and Feagin 2009). Though these words at times are used interchangeably, they mean various things to different people depending on the geographical location or the ethnic population being discussed. I became aware of these differences during my frequent visits to the west coast of the United States. When first asked my ethnic origin by some of my west coast colleagues, I replied “Spanish.” Their initial response was “were you born in Spain”? I then quickly responded “Hispanic, you know, like you” and their response was “I’m Latino.” I quickly became aware of the different contexts of these
words depending on the audience. On a macro or census level, this collective segment of population is known as “Hispanic.” This population is lumped together based upon the criteria of language, national origin, surname and customs and is portrayed as a monolithic group. Some people reject this label as having been assigned by the U.S. government, rather than by the group itself. The first time the label of Hispanic was used was in the 1970 U.S. census (Cobas, Duany and Feagin, 2009). During the era of civil rights, Spanish-speaking groups increasingly used the term Latino as a label of empowerment, representing their struggle and as an alternative to the government assigned label of Hispanic.

Latinos as an ethnic/racial group did not magically appear in the United States in 1970. They existed as a large segment of the population prior to being captured by the 1970 census. Some have even argued that Latinos/Hispanics are one of the oldest minority groups to reside in the U.S outside of the indigenous groups of North America (Cobas, Duany and Feagin, 2009).

*Latino History*

Latinos are a diverse group made up of recently arrived immigrants and U.S. born citizens whose origins are deeply rooted in colonialism and struggle (Gonzalez, 2011). As mentioned before, the term Latino is an umbrella term used to identify groups of people whose cultural origins are from the Spanish speaking countries/regions of Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and certain parts of South America (Cobas, Duany and Feagin, 2009; San Miguel and Donato, 2010). The majority of these groups are politically and economically limited in power within the United States and are ascribed minority group status. Because of the stigma attached to the minority status of being
Latino/Hispanic, many recently arrived immigrants from Latin America refuse to identify as such and instead self-identify by their national origin (Cobas, Duany and Feagin, 2009). Though Latinos are a diverse group of people, which encompass many individuals and groups from various national origins, the academic discourse surrounding their history and educational experience tends to be portrayed as a homogenous narrative reflecting the experiences and struggles of the two largest groups of Latinos—people of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent (San Miguel and Donato, 2010).

Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have the longest history within the United States and are by far the two largest groups of Latinos. Most academic discourse paints the picture of all Latinos sharing the same homogenous experience, a monolithic Latino experience, but this is not true. Latinos within the United States are diverse and have distinct histories of migration, racial construction, class identification, culture heritage and struggle for identity. As Cobas, Duany and Feagin (2009) illustrate:

Although single label implies otherwise, “Hispanics” or “Latinos” are not a homogeneous entity, and should not be presumed to be so. Even the newcomers among them differ notably in national and social–class origins, cultural backgrounds, phenotypes (many mixing indigenous pre–Colombian ancestries with European, African, and Asian roots), migration histories, legal statuses, and contacts a reception in the United States. (p.17)

Latinos commonalities should be highlighted, but their differences should also be recognized and discussed within academic discourse. The common trait between many Latino/Hispanic groups is the Spanish language (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; Tienda & Mitchell, 2006; Torres, 2004). Language is commonly viewed as a characteristic which brings Latinos together as a group. Though Latinos share some similarities such as a common language, a similar perceived phenotype, a story of migration, and a history of
being oppressed within the United States, they also share many differences. Latinos within public discourse have consistently been stereotyped and assumed “the same” because of these perceived commonalities, but they are not. One difference can be seen in the migration pattern of two of the largest segments of the Latino population — Mexicans and Puerto Ricans.

**Migration and History of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans**

In 2003, Hispanics/Latinos surpassed African Americans as the largest minority group in the United States. This marked the first time in Latinos/Hispanics history that their growth was based on a natural birth increase as opposed to migration (Cobas, Duany & Feagin 2009; Tienda and Mitchell, 2006). For decades Latino/Hispanic growth in this country was due to immigration/migration from various national origins, primarily Mexico and Puerto Rico. Latinos migrated to six main “receiving” states — California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York and Texas (Bartlett & Garcia, 2011; Capps et al., 2005; Capps, Fix, and Passel 2002; Fry 2007). Within states like California and Texas, Mexicans have the longest history. This history is a contested one that goes hand in hand with American imperialism, oppression and forced assimilation.

Much of the Southwest and Western regions of the United States were once owned and occupied by Mexico. In 1848, after the Mexican-American War, Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which gave the United States control over most of what is now the Western and Southwestern parts of the country (Nieto and Rivera, n.d.). As result of the Treaty, Mexican residents who inhabited those areas had the choice of becoming U.S. citizens or of being displaced and forced into Mexico. Since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the U.S. and Mexico have had a contentious relationship marred
by oppression and forced assimilation. Mexicans are the oldest, largest group of Latinos/Hispanics in the United States with the longest history of racial oppression as a subordinate ethnic group (Cobas, Duany and Feagin, 2009). When the United States “took” ownership of this part of the country, they had to incorporate a large number of people into Anglo-Saxon cultural and linguistic norms. For those Mexicans who decided to stay in the U.S., they were forced to assimilate into American culture and adopt this new way of living.

From 1852 until 1920 Mexicans were coded as “white” for US Census purposes (Cobas, Duany and Feagin, 2009; MacDonald and Carrillo, 2010). As many have noted (Cobas, Duany and Feagin, 2009; Davila, 2001; Mendible, 2007; Rodriguez, 1997), Hispanics/Latinos did not exist as a racial group then, but were located somewhere ambiguously between Blacks and Whites. This has pushed Latinos toward the margins within the racial dynamic of the United States. Though Mexicans were classified as “white” there was a clear difference between them and those who self-identified as white and who enjoyed the privileges of being white. In States like Texas and California, white residents often spoke of Mexicans as “niggers” or “dirty mongrels” (Cobas, Duany and Feagin 2009; DeConde, 1992). Similar to Mexicans, Puerto Ricans have a similar relationship of conquest, oppression and imperialism with the United States.

Puerto Rico was a possession of the Spanish Empire since 1493 when Columbus “claimed” the island on his second trip to the New World. After Puerto Rico’s “discovery,” its inhabitants were forced into slavery and virtually abolished because of war and European infectious disease. Spanish rule of the island continued for over 400 years, until the United States gained control of the island under the Treaty of Paris of
1898 as a result the Spanish-Cuban-American War. Puerto Ricans were granted the right
to “citizenship” in 1917 under the Jones Act. Puerto Rico remained a colony of the
United States until 1952, when it was reconstituted as a commonwealth. Because of this
history and “automatic” citizenship, Puerto Rico and its residents are viewed differently
among Latinos/Hispanics. The U.S.’s initial interest in the island of Puerto Rico was not
only its proximity to the mainland of the United States and economic opportunities,
specifically the sugar and tobacco industries, but also the fact that the residents of the
island were “perceived at the time to have a whiter population” (Cobas, Duany and
Feagin 2009, p.5). This perception along with automatic citizenship would inform the
relationship of Puerto Ricans with the United States.

Puerto Rico has obeen described as a commuter nation and many Puerto Ricans
migrated to the Northeast region of the United States, inhabiting ethnic enclaves that
were already inhabited by Cubans and Spaniards (Cobas, Duany and Feagin 2009; Nieto
and Rivera, n.d.). Most migrated to the United States in search of better opportunities,
both economically and socially which the United States was perceived to offer. It wasn’t
until the 1950’s, a decade that saw Puerto Ricans migrate to this country more than any
other “immigrant” group, that the United States government started to track Puerto
Ricans and publish census data (Cobas, Duany and Feagin 2009). Puerto Ricans have
continued to migrate back and forth from the island to the United States, with some
deciding to permanently reside in the United States.

With the growing presence of Puerto Ricans, The United States had to decide
what to do with the expanding Latino population and how they would be characterized. 
As mentioned previously, in the 1970s the United States decided to characterize this
segment of the population as Hispanic, which began a new “racial” group within the demographics of the country. As Cobas, Duany and Feagin (2009) contend:

Racialization often entails minimizing historical, cultural, and linguistic differences among people from the same region— including, for example, those in various Latin American countries. Such labels as “Hispanic” typically collapsed diverse peoples into a single overarching group according to criteria devised by the dominant white majority. (p.9)

Though Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and other Hispanic groups have a diverse history, culture and reasons of immigration, the discourse has lumped them all in one homogenous group based on perceived similarities.

The notion of race within the United States is perceived as a process to put people “in their place” in a hierarchical society based on social and political strategies of those in power. Race places labels on groups of people to establish in-group and out-groups relations that pins an “us vs. them” dynamic, and results in groups being labeled as dominant and subordinate with victors and vanquished (Cobas, Duany and Feagin, 2009). Race, however, is a category that is interpreted differently in Latin American countries. Latinos refer to themselves within their nation-states by their national origin, but once they arrive in the United States they are all categorized as Latino/Hispanic. This is the case with the two largest Latino groups, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Though Latinos/Hispanics are a perceived subordinate group, many have rejected this racial construct and continue to push back against those forces of power.

Since the census of 1980, many Latinos/Hispanics have refused to identify with Hispanic/Latino as a racial construct and instead have decided to identify on the census as “other” (Cobas, Duany and Feagin 2009). In states like California, Texas, and New York, Latinos/Hispanics associate with this racial construct but also have etched out their own
niche by creating identities such as Chicano, Tejano, and Boricua. These groups associate with the larger dynamics and are supporters of the collective struggle, but also celebrate their differences and celebrate their own histories and identities. Latinos/Hispanics have, throughout their existence as a group within the U.S., struggled against and pushed back against those in power. As MacDonald and Carrillo (2010) contend: “Latinos have not been passive recipients of dominating cultures, but rather have found ways to retain elements of their culture, heritage, and language when possible” (p.10). This is most evident in Latinos/Hispanics’ struggles within education.

**Education of Latinos**

Schools as an institution within the United States have been used and viewed as a vehicle of socialization and conformity into American culture (San Miguel and Donato, 2010; Spring, 1998). This holds true for the majority of newly arrived immigrants to the United States and is especially true for those of Latin American decent. The needs of this growing community have not always been met by schools and the educational system. As San Miguel and Donato (2010) state, for minority students schools have served a “reproductive function and sought to ensure that they remained a subordinate group by providing them with only limited access to separate, inferior, subtractive and non–academic instruction” (p. 29). Like all other “subordinate” or “minority groups”, Latinos are often placed and segregated into separate and inferior schools whose main purpose is not to educate, but to reproduce the class and social inequality that exists in the United States at the time. Latino students are exposed to some of the highest levels of poverty, which have a negative impact on their schooling experience and the resources provided by the school (Bartlett and García 2011; Gándara and Contreras 2009).
This lack of opportunity, social inequality and oppression affects all Latino groups (San Miguel and Donato, 2010). Latino/Hispanic students are often stripped of their culture and forced to assimilate into American culture. In many instances they are not allowed to be taught or speak within schools in Spanish, and are required to learn educational material in English only. Because of this forced assimilation and process of subtractive schooling, many Latino students are classified as intellectually inferior with regard to their white counterparts based on their scores on biased intelligence test (San Miguel and Donato, 2010). This practice has led to placing Latino students often into classes for the “educationally mentally retarded” or “slow.” This deficit perception of Latino/Hispanic students has been prevalent throughout the late 19th and early parts of the 20th century. Today, though the discourse surrounding Latinos has shifted somewhat and doesn’t paint Latinos in such a negative manner, Latinos within education are still viewed through a deficit orientation lens and a monolithic lived experience, most closely associated to the Mexican/Mexican-American experience.

The overwhelming majority of research conducted about Latinos and their educational experience, past and present, focuses on Mexicans or Mexican-Americans. This is understandable given the fact that out of the over 48 million people in the U.S. who identify as Hispanic on the 2009 census, over 31 million identify themselves as Mexican (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). The largest concentrations of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans reside on the West coast or Southwest region of the United States.

Though we are learning more about the Latino educational experience through research which focuses on Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, their lived experience is different from the rest of the Latino population. As Irizarry and Antrop-González (2007)
contend, Puerto Ricans are “positioned simultaneously as U.S. citizens and colonial subjects; efforts aimed at understanding the experiences of Puerto Rican students in mainland schools must take into account the complex identities that emerge as a result” (p.39). Puerto Ricans present a unique experience, which much of the literature on Latinos does not capture. How do the educational experiences of these other Latino groups differ from those who identify as Mexican descent?

In this study I will analyze these educational experiences in more detail and try to contend that though there are some similarities, there are differences as well. This study will focus on Latino males specifically from New York who are not of Mexican decent. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are the two largest Latino populations residing in New York (U.S. Census, 2010), and are the second and fifth largest Latino populations residing in the U.S. (U.S. Census 2010), but little is known about their educational experience as a whole, especially in relation to higher education. Even less is known about the Puerto Rican and Dominican male educational experience, specifically concerning higher education. Most of the research conducted and data captured in recent studies focus on Latinas and their struggles to access and graduate from higher education, as opposed to Latinos.

Along with unique educational experiences, Latinos have a distinct pattern of how they navigate and negotiate the higher educational system within the United States. Whereas 16% of Puerto Ricans and 15% of Dominicans have a college education and hold a Bachelor’s degree, only 9% of Mexicans do (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Though Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have a higher percentage of college graduates, the number of college graduates are far less than those of Mexican descent. Whereas there are just
under three million people of Mexican descent who have earned a college degree, there are 705,920 Puerto Ricans and 206,400 Dominicans who have earned a degree. When combined, the total number of Puerto Rican and Dominican college graduates equal less than a third of all Mexicans who have earned a college degree. What is the educational experience of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans and what is the effect of that experience on their access to higher education?

**Puerto Rican Education**

There is more literature concerning the educational experience of Puerto Ricans than of Dominicans. The literature on the schooling of Puerto Ricans covers three main categories:

2. Identity (Flores, 2000; Flores-González, 1999; Hernández, 1995)

Puerto Rican students have historically been described within the educational literature as underperforming. As Irizarry and Antrop-González (2007) contend: “traditional notions of cultural capital also tend to define Puerto Rican students and others of diverse cultural backgrounds by who they are not and what they may lack, as opposed to who they are and what assets they bring to school” (p.45). These ways of perceiving Puerto Rican students are more inclined to view them from a deficit perspective as opposed to the strengths they can bring to schools. In his work, Rosado (1991) details some of the factors which lead to Puerto Rican students’ dropping out/being pushed out of school. Rosado (1991) states that “factors such as low self-esteem,
low educational attainment, and peer influence play heavily in the Puerto Rican drop-out rate” (p.429). According to his study, these factors have negative effects on Puerto Rican students and their education, eventually leading to student delinquency. This is the major cause for Puerto Ricans students’ lack of success in school and of their being dropped/pushed out of school. In Rosado’s study, Puerto Rican males tended to have a higher delinquency and drop/push out rates. Though there are many studies which focus on the lack of success of Puerto Rican students, some scholars are trying to shift the discourse and have begun to identify positive aspects and the success of Puerto Rican students (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007).

In their work, Delgado and Rivera (1997) show how Puerto Rican Natural Support Systems (NSS) could have a positive effect on students’ success if utilized properly. Natural Support Systems were first recognized as having an impact on Puerto Rican communities within the social work and human services literature (Delgado and Rivera, 1997; De La Rosa, 1988; Delgado, 1982; Sanchez- Ayendez, 1988). Puerto Rican Natural Support Systems consist of individuals who are both family members and community members that provide for the welfare, growth, safety and development of these students (Delgado and Rivera 1997). These individuals are heavily involved in the student’s lives and provide guidance. Natural Support Systems play a crucial role in promoting “a sense of identity, belonging, and self–esteem in the students’ lives” (Delgado and Rivera 1997). Natural Support System are networks of individuals which are there to help guide the students through times of need and offer assistance and advice.

Delgado and Rivera (1997) believe that the lack of success in schools of many students of color, which include Puerto Rican students, has to do with the lack of
collaboration between the schools, educators and the community support systems. They contend that one of the reasons why collaborative relationships are not built on a more consistent basis is because of misunderstanding and miscommunication, which takes places between the families, schools and formal organizations. This miscommunication and misunderstanding takes place because of the deep-rooted histories of racism and inequalities which exist (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Delgado and Rivera, 1997; Scott-Jones, 1994). Delgado and Rivera (1997) suggest that in order for Puerto Rican students to be successful within educational settings schools, educators and outside organizations need to collaborate with the students Natural Support Systems and integrate them into the educational process.

Delgado and Rivera (1997) recognized four major types of Natural Support Systems for Puerto Rican Students. These four types of Natural Support Systems were:

1. Family and Friends;
2. Religion;
3. Folk Healers and;

Though these were the Natural Support Systems for Puerto Rican students within their study, there are other entities and institutions that may also serve this function. Delgado and Rivera (1997) suggest that if we are to move in the direction of promoting success within the Puerto Rican community, Natural Support Systems must be identified, relationships must be built, and collaborative activities must be planned. Natural Support Systems are a step in the right direction in promoting educational success among Puerto Rican students and show how social networks (social capital) play a role in supporting
and assisting students in their educational pathways. Puerto Rican students’ ethnic identity and disposition plays an important role in their success.

Flores-González (1999) has investigated the role ethnic identity plays in Puerto Rican students success. Her work builds on the work of scholars who investigate the impact of ethnic identity perception on school success, specifically the notion of acting “white” (Foly, 1991; Hemmings, 1996; Mehan et al., 1994; Matute-Bianchi, 1986). As Flores-González (1999) states, these studies illustrate how “involuntary minorities did not have to choose performing well in school or maintaining their ethnic identities; they can be ‘ethnic’ and ‘model’ students simultaneously” (p.344). These studies challenge the notion that ethnic students, or involuntary minorities, associate school success with a perceived notion of “whiteness,” as in the Fordham and Ogbo (1986) study that concluded that peer pressure meant performing badly in school. Flores-González (1999) found that in the school in which she conducted her research, Puerto Rican students did not have an oppositional ethnic identity which rejected notions of “whiteness,” but did acknowledge that their ethnic identity was different from what was perceived in the mainstream U.S. culture. Flores-González (1999) suggest that high achieving students were encouraged, recognized, and celebrated. Though there was a culture of success within school, she also documented that these opportunities were offered to a limited number of students. The Puerto Rican students in her study associated academic success with middle-class behaviors and not with ethnic identity. She argues that school performance of ethnic and involuntary minorities may have more to do with “structural conditions that poverty and minority status cast and their negative effect on the formation and maintenance of the student role than with ethnicity” (p.360). These students
encounter more obstacles and have to deal with more critical issues than do affluent students. One of the obstacles many less affluent students face is the lack of quality teachers within their schools.

Irizarry and Antrop-González (2007) examine the impact teachers have on Puerto Rican students’ success. They contend that little work has been conducted analyzing the effect of culturally responsive teachers on Puerto Rican students. They call for a “RicanStruction” of the current negative academic discourse regarding Puerto Rican students, and promote a more positive discourse which discusses school and student success. They believe that culture and culturally responsive pedagogies have been narrowly conceived and analyzed and that in order to “RicanStruct” this discourse, scholars must challenge these current notions. Irizarry and Antrop-González (2007) state, “reconceptualizing culturally responsive pedagogy may help teachers respond more effectively to how culture is manifested among their students into the multiple sites from which the students draw their cultural identities” (p.54).

Culture can play a significant role in the education of all students of color. In order to be culturally responsive, teachers must have a better understanding of how their students conceptualize and embody culture and consciously incorporate that into their pedagogical practices. This understanding must come from a place of experience as opposed to learning it through academic discourse because some academic discourse perceives culture as static, and may portray it from a negative perspective: “Culture reflects a changing set of values and practices that may vary from person to person; therefore, culturally responsive approaches must be situated in specific contexts and account for variability among members of the group” (Irizarry and Antrop-González,
Building on other scholars’ work (Moll et al., 1992; Villegas and Lucas 2002), Irizarry and Antrop-González (2007) believe that “culturally responsive teacher practices are contingent on teachers knowing their students well, viewing themselves as agents of social change, and connecting curriculum to students’ fund of knowledge” (p.42). Teachers who subscribe to culturally responsive teacher practices immerse themselves within the lives of the students they teach and the communities in which they teach. This allows for a stronger connection between the students and teachers and allows for teachers to have a “feel” for the students and all the potential barriers and resources, which may be present in the student’s life.

Puerto Rican students in the Irizarry and Antrop-González study (2007) showed a higher respect for teachers who were “willing to deconstruct traditional teacher-student power relationships and assume positions of humility in order to learn together” (p.48). When these traditional power dynamics were challenged and put to the side, success rates increased. Teachers learned more about the students’ lives and cultures. They were able to incorporate what they had learned into the classroom, and in turn, students were able to relate and connect with the school curriculum.

Nieto (2004) suggests that in order to be a multicultural educator, one must first be a multicultural person. Teachers in the Nieto study viewed their work as not a job, but as a “life-style” choice. Their work as teachers had an impact on their student’s lives as much as they felt the students had an impact on their own personal lives and development as teachers and people.

Irizarry and Antrop-González (2007) also contend that their study challenges the
negative perceptions of Puerto Rican students by highlighting academically successful students. This challenges the existing discourse that only views Puerto Rican students from a negative and deficit perspective. Irizarry and Antro-González (2007) contend that their research reveals the importance of “home-grown” teachers who were born and/or raised in the communities in which they teach. This connection that “home-grown” teachers can make with students is especially powerful, as they can relate to their students’ experience and offer alternative perceptions of success.

Irizarry and Antrop-González’s (2007) work highlights how teachers within schools can have a direct impact on the formation of the disposition of students. Nurturing and culturally responsive teachers and pedagogical practices can have a direct influence on student’s perception of school and their success rate. As illustrated in this section, Puerto Rican students’ educational experience and pathways are reflected in the current academic discourse of Latinos/Hispanics in education, but they are also marginalized by a monolithic discourse. Puerto Rican students present a unique educational experience. This study will present alternatives to the current discourse.

**Dominican Education**

Dominicans are a substantial and fast growing part of the immigrant U.S. Latino population, but they have been virtually absent from the Latino education literature. As mentioned before, Dominicans are the fifth largest ethic group within Latinos. The vast majority of Dominicans live within the Northeastern region of the United States, with large concentrations residing in New York City. Within N.Y.C. Dominicans constitute the second largest Latino group, only trailing Puerto Ricans (Bartlett & Garcia, 2011). Along with being the second largest Latino group in N.Y.C., they are the largest
documented immigrant group in New York City schools, composing 19% of the immigrant school population in 1999-2000 (Bartlett & Garcia, 2011).

The majority of Dominicans within the United States are foreign born (57%) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011).

The United States has had a long relationship with the Dominican Republic dating to 1916 when it occupied the island until 1924. The U.S. again became involved with the island after 1961 when the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo ended. During the civil war of 1965, the U.S. led an intervention, which resulted in the United States opening up its borders for Dominican immigration in order to avoid what it considered “another Cuba” (Bartlett & Garcia, 2011; Itzigsohn & Cabral, 2000). The steady flow of immigration continued through the 1970’s and 1980’s because of economic problems the island was confronting. These economic troubles continued through the 1990’s, which were accompanied by the government taking out loans to help stimulate and support the economy. As Bartlett and Garcia (2011) explain, these loans “were commonly accompanied by structural adjustment policies that mandated funding cuts in critical social sectors” (p.32). One of the sectors which was cut was public education, forcing many Dominicans to leave the island in pursuit of better opportunities in the United States.

Dominicans have migrated to the United States utilizing what is known as a step or stepwise pattern of migration (Bartlett & Garcia, 2011). This pattern of migration usually takes place in steps, with one family member leaving for the host country and establishing themselves economically and socially before sending back for other members of the family. Family members usually join one by one until all members have
migrated to the new country. This migration pattern usually takes a long time because of the lengthy and tedious process of obtaining permanent visas (Bartlett and Garcia, 2011; Grasmuck & Pessar 1991; Itzigsohn 2009). Like other Latino groups, this foreign born status coupled with the stepwise migration process poses unique circumstances for this group. As Bartlett and Garcia (2011) state “through this stepwise migration, Dominican workers and their families are gradually absorbed into low–paying jobs and shockingly high levels of poverty” (p.39). There are a large segment of Dominican migrants who work in low-end service and manufacturing jobs, which lead to many Dominicans living in poverty.

Dominicans are more likely to live in poverty than native-born Latinos and are more likely to live in highly segregated areas where schools lack resources and well trained teachers (Bartlett & Garcia 2011; Fry & Gonzalez 2008; Orfield & Lee 2005; Orfield & Eaton 1996). Many Dominicans have joined other Latino enclaves, which have absorbed them within the fabric of the community. A large portion of Dominicans in N.Y.C. live in the Washington Heights area of Northern Manhattan and Western portions of the Bronx. In 2000, the largest concentration of Dominicans outside the Dominican Republic lived in Washington Heights (Bartlett & Garcia 2011; Duany, 2003). Accompanying the high poverty rates and low opportunity levels, Washington Heights in the early 1990’s led the city in homicides, had the largest concentration of teenagers, most overcrowded schools, and one of the highest unemployment rates in N.Y.C. (Bartlett & Garcia 2011; Garcia, 1993; Gonzalez, 1992). Besides a life in high poverty areas and overcrowded schools, Dominicans’ immigrant status also brings along with it other barriers which Dominicans must overcome.
As with many newly arrived Latino immigrant groups, acclimating to their new environment can be difficult. Many experience difficulty integrating into their schools because of the language and cultural differences. As many scholars have noted, immigrant students who have received some education in their home country are more likely to drop out of school than students who have received all their education in the US (Bartlett & Garcia, 2011; Vernez & Abrahamse 1996; Van Hook & Fix 2000). Many times this is because of the “subtractive” process (Valenzuela, 1999), which takes place in U.S. schools, which aims to strip culturally diverse populations of all their culture and assimilate them to U.S. culture. For many Dominican students this means introducing them to new cultural norms and attempting to strip them of Spanish. For some Dominican students, this subtractive and unwelcoming environment proves too much and many students drop out.

Bartlett and Garcia (2011) illustrate how some schools within Washington Heights try to combat this subtractive process by employing an “additive schooling” process which is an “approach that builds on an extensive social, cultural, and linguistic assets brought by multilingual, diverse student populations, and aims to prepare bicultural and bilingual students to negotiate their complex worlds” (p.22). Schools that have been able to successfully retain and integrate Dominican students have employed this method.

Little is known about Dominican students’ educational experience in the United States (For exceptions, see Bartlett and García, 2011; López 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; and Hernández 1990, 2004). Even less is known as to the gendered experience of Dominicans in higher education. Morales (2010) is the only source that provides some insight into Dominican males and higher education.
More research into the educational experience of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans is needed. Also needed is research on the experience of the transition from high school to college of both Puerto Rican and Dominican students. This is precisely what this dissertation attempts to do. Using Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of practice (which will be discussed in the next section), I will attempt to better understand what are the barriers and resources that Latino male students negotiate in making the transition from high school to college. Since this study focuses on Latino males specifically, the section below discusses how the scholarly literature has viewed the masculinity of Latinos.

**Masculinity and Latinos**

Little is known of the lived experience of Latino males in the United States and few scholars investigate what it means to be a Latino male in this country. Only recently has there been an emergence of studies which begin to focus on the plight of Latino males (Noguera, Hurtado and Fergus, 2012; Sanenz and Ponjuan, 2009). Though Latino males have higher drop out/push out rates than any other ethnic group and are severely underrepresented in higher education, little is known as to why they are not succeeding. In trying to investigate why Latino males are not represented within higher education, an analysis of what it means to be a Latino male is in order. Noguera, Hurtado and Fergus (2012) believe that scholars and researchers must first uncover and analyze “the broader expression of Latino masculinities” (p.4).

Little is known as to how Latino males construct, interpret and embody masculinity and the role, if any, it plays on their academic achievement. As Noguera, Hurtado and Fergus (2012) contend, little is known about Latino males outside of their communities. What is most commonly known are stereotypical media images which
“often cast them as macho chauvinist, docile but reliable workers willing to accept even the dirtiest jobs at lowest wages, or gangsters and drug traffickers wreaking havoc on inner-city streets” (Noguera, Hurtado and Fergus 2012, p.5). These images are negative which may influence how “outsiders” view this population and impact educator’s perceptions and willingness to understand and assist in addressing the issues many Latino males face. This perception of Latino maleness/masculinity is often narrow and limited.

Though masculinity plays a role in how Latino men perceive and act in this society, their maleness is not the only lens Latino men use to make sense of this world. Like other racial/ethnic groups, Latino males use a variety of lenses while interacting with the world around them. As Noguera, Hurtado and Fergus (2012) state: “class, sexuality, ethnicity, and race also shape and influence the way Latino men are treated and their perceptions of social reality”(p. 11). Though Latino males utilize a variety of lenses to view and make sense of the world, little is known about the intersection of these influences and how this shapes their masculinity. One theory, which has been widely accepted and utilized to examine and explain Latino masculinity, is the construct of *machismo*. This framework as of late has been challenged because of the deficit-orientated and monolithic manner in which it portrays Latino males. Machismo is seen as being embodied in Latino males in three different ways: through the mind, through social interactions and through culture.

*Machismo*

When defining the construct of machismo one may envision several different things. Machismo is closely identified with power and control. Many scholars (Felix-Ortiz et. al., 2012; Sabralske, 2006; Sternberg, 2000; Stobbe, 2005) have described
machismo as the need for Latino males to exert power and control over their partners, families and ultimately themselves. Under this construct, Latino males may feel a need to be the “breadwinner” of the household, which also entails providing safety. This responsibility comes with the need for the male to exert his power over all others within the household. But power is exerted in many different ways under this construct. As Felix-Ortiz et al., (2012) state:

Some researchers have conceptualize this as a gender role as endowed with power (e.g., Casas et al., 1994), others in terms of ego integrity or psychological power (e.g., Diaz–Guerrero, 1955; Sabralske, 2006), while others as economic power (e.g., De La Canela, 1986; Stobbe, 2005) or power to demand or evoke respect from the family (Torres et al., 2002). (p. 143)

Latino males who subscribe to this construct of machismo are able to exert power in many different ways. Though there are different ways Latino males enact their power, all forms potentially lead to dominance over the family unit, but more specifically over woman. This dominance results in an attitude that males are naturally different from women. Males are perceived as natural born leaders which leads to the denial of power and opportunity for women, and which also accounts for the division of labor that exists in many Latin American countries, as well as households (Felix-Ortiz et al., 2012; Stobbe, 2005). Though these are common conceptions of what machismo is, there are various views as to how Latino males embody this construct or identity.

Psychology was the first discipline to identify and utilize the construct of machismo. As pointed out by Felix-Ortiz, Ankney, Brodie & Rodinsky (2012), one of the first studies around Latino male constructs was conducted by Rogelio Diaz- Guerrero (1955). This framework “initially defined machismo in psychoanalytic terms as a defense mechanism against feelings of powerlessness, inferiority, or low self-esteem resulting
from a poorly resolved Oedipal conflict” (p.136). Machismo was seen as a way to analyze and understand Latino males and their differences with the larger population. This analysis was initially applied to the Mexican and Mexican American population. In this psychological analysis of this group, machismo was perceived to be a “hyper-polarized masculine gender role rooted in veneration of the mother and reflecting a fundamental ambivalence towards women” (Diaz-Guerrero, 1955; Peñalosa 1968; Felix-Ortiz et al., 2012, pp.136-137). Within this construct, men are portrayed as hyper-masculine who dominate the household through their physical strength. Latina women are seen as objects of male domination and are subjected to the rule of the male of the household. This hyper-masculine activity is the result of years of oppression and trauma from a “still unhealed rape,” which Mexican Indian males endured during the conflict with the Spanish conquistadors (Stavans, 1966; Felix-Ortiz et al., 2012). This gender role calls for men to deny any “feminine” feelings, which are perceived to be soft and “un-man like.” Instead, they must exert their physical force to dominate women and their families within the cultural hierarchy (Felix-Ortiz et al., 2012).

Described in this psychodynamic theory, Latino masculinity and machismo can be viewed as filled with anxiety and tension, which males harbor and embody. This need to feel superior and to dominate based upon systematic historical oppression by the societies in which they reside, can take a toll on the mental and physical health of Latino males. Also this construct paints Latino masculinity, specifically this notion of machismo, as a deficit-oriented construct because it describes them as hyper-masculine (Felix-Ortiz, 2012). In contrast, as we will see below, the social modeling construct of machismo suggests a similar perspective of machismo, but the embodiment of this gender role takes
place in a different way.

The social modeling construct and theory surrounding machismo differs from the psychodynamic theory described above. In the social modeling theory, machismo is viewed as more of a script, which Latino males learn as children as they are socialized within society. Similar to the psychodynamic construct, machismo is still seen as an exaggerated hyper-masculine gender role/script that is transmitted from parent to child (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988; Felix-Ortiz et al., 2012). Rather than a personality trait, which the psychodynamic constructs suggest, young boys are socialized and taught this role through their interaction with their parents. As Felix-Ortiz et al., (2012) suggest: “boys are taught to show no distress, to feel shame about feelings or fear or distress, to be proud overaggressive or daring action, and to exert internal personal control through aggressive dominance” (p.137). Many males share a similar gender role, but when applied to Latinos this construct is viewed as a hyper-masculine construct, one shrouded with negativity and socially constructed and transmitted. Though the psychodynamic construct illustrates machismo as an unconscious mental disposition, the social modeling construct challenges this notion and suggest that machismo is learned and transmitted from generation to generation. As Feliz-Ortiz et al., (2012) suggest:

machismo is probably not a personality trait, but rather something that can be changed over time or with experience. Nevertheless, this definition of machismo represents a psychological/psychiatric approach to conceptualizing machismo since it retains an emphasis on machismo as a deficit. (p.137)

Though the social modeling construct views the transmission of machismo as taking place socially through interactions its emphasis of is still seen as negative and a relationship that is based on power, control and dominance of males. Similar to the social
modeling construct, the culturalist model of machismo emphasizes social interaction, but views this interaction through a cultural lens.

According to Felix-Ortiz et al., (2012) “culturalist theories of machismo incorporate social and political with the psychological aspects of Latino masculinity to legitimize machismo as part of the Latino culture and history” (p.138). The culturalist model deems that machismo is a manifestation of the Latino male’s social, political and psychological experience and this negative oppressed lived experience is culturally inherited as transmitted. This cultural manifestation is transmitted on an unconscious level and is enacted at a conscious level. Furthermore, it is a reaction against the larger pressure of the social constructs in which Latino males interact on a daily basis (De La Cancela, 1986; Felix-Ortiz et al, 2012). Though the culturalist model views machismo as a cultural manifestation, there is still little research as to the “full extent to which race and class influence machismo” (Felix-Ortiz et al., 2012, p.138). What is the role of race and class in this manifestation of machismo? What is this connection and why is this construct unique to Latino males? Though aggression and dominance are two characteristics of machismo, intimacy and how it is expressed is shown differently depending on the construct to which one adheres.

As Felix-Ortiz et al., (2012) suggest: “while psychodynamic scholars suggest intimacy is achieved only through aggression, culturalists suggest that machismo requires openness in some relationships (spousal, familial) and guardedness of others (with other men, strangers)” (p.138). Though intimacy is viewed as being achieved and applied on different contexts depending on the construct utilized, what this also suggests is that machismo is not a static phenomenon as it is portrayed. Machismo may not be linear, but
may be situational. Also there may be various “degrees,” “utilization” or “subscription” of machismo, depending on the national origin of the male and how long they have been in the U.S. This all may dictate how, and if, machismo is constructed and used.

Klein’s (2007) study on Mexican baseball players showed just how machismo could be situational. In Klein’s study, baseball players portrayed different levels of maleness depending on their ethnicity. The Mexican players were seen as displaying more “maleness” than the other players on the team, especially their white counterparts. Though they showed “more” maleness or machismo than their peers, they were able to control their emotions and only express them in some situations (Felix-Ortiz et al., 2012). Though this is one example of how machismo may be situational, more studies need to take place to investigate by whom, when and where machismo is most often expressed.

Another example of machismo viewed as situational was a study conducted by Harris (2008) which found that many Latino male college students found some aspects of machismo as beneficial, but also knew in what social conditions to apply this identity. As Felix-Ortiz et al., (2012) contend:

Harris (2008) found that college men identified many positive aspects of masculinity as “truly” defining the term (e.g., character, respect, integrity), yet also reported having conversations with their male peers that featured demeaning references to women, boast about sexual “hooking up,” and other “hyper masculine performance” that would not be displayed with women peers. (p.145)

Harris (2008) illustrated how these Latino males were very conscious of this identity. In certain social settings, i.e., amongst other male peers, this construct was seen as a socially acceptable role or identity in which they interacted with each other. They also saw many positive aspects of this identity construct that contributed to their identity, but also knew in what situations to enact it and what aspects would be beneficial to them and where.
Both of these studies illustrate how the construct of machismo may not be a static male identity for Latino males.

Recently some scholars are challenging and interrogating the construct of machismo. Felix-Ortiz et al., (2012) have questioned whether or not machismo is an attitude that is permanent (i.e., a trait) or relatively open to change? Many questions exist concerning this construct because much of the research conducted is dated and no studies follow boys over time to see which factors influence this attitude, and whether changes in environment and biology have an impact on potential change. But is there a monolithic Latino male identity? Though the construct of machismo can be applied to Latino males, it can also be applied to other males from different racial/ethnic groups. As Felix-Ortiz et al., (2012) suggest: “some scholars conceptualize machismo as Latino male identity; however, others suggest it defines individuals from a variety of ethno-racial identities, genders, sexualities, socioeconomic classes, and sexual preferences” (p. 136). Though machismo is often viewed solely as a Latino male construct, it shares similarities with other male constructs. This hyper masculine construct has also been associated with some woman as well as homosexual males (Felix-Ortiz, 2012). There needs to be a further investigation of Latino male identity which lives outside of the machismo construct and which accounts and reflects the changing environments and social structures in which Latino males interact, and how their identity and masculinity is accepted or challenged within these environments. A Latino male identity informed by machismo, but it may also challenge this construct and recognize that not all Latinos experience social structures in the same way.

As Torres & Fergus (2012) explain, Latinos are not a monolithic group and are
comprised of individuals who identify with various and multiple national origins, ethnicities and race. Though many scholars and researchers acknowledge that there is disparity between those who identify as Latinos, much of the research presents Latinos in a monolithic manner. In order to better understand this population, research needs to focus on the similarities between groups, but also spend time analyzing differences. This goes not only for cultural differences within the Latino diaspora, but also for gender differences as well.

**Theoretical Framework and Latinos in Higher Education**

This study will use Bourdieu’s (1990; 1992) theoretical framework for examining social practice to analyze and comprehend the factors that are involved in the high school to college transition process for Latino students. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of practice, which will be explained in more detail in a later section, utilizes his “theoretical tools” of field, habitus and capital and examines their interplay. This interplay is what Bourdieu suggests produces an individual’s social practice. An in-depth explanation of each of his “theoretical tools” will be provided to explain how Bourdieu intended social practice to be examined. Along with an explanation of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, I will review the literature on Latinos in higher education. I will attempt to divide this literature into sections that coincide with each of Bourdieu’s “theoretical tools”. Each section provides a review of literature of Latinos and higher education, which frame Bourdieu’s “theoretical tools” as either a barrier or resource.

**Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice**

Bourdieu’s (1990; 1992) theory of practice analyzes the dialectical relationship of each of his three “theoretical technologies” or “tools,” which he identifies as habitus,
capital, and field in an attempt to investigate and explain an individual’s social practice. Bourdieu argued that these theoretical technologies simultaneously interact with and are in opposition to each other, producing an agent’s social practice. Bourdieu created this theory as an attempt to better understand an individual’s action or social practice or why people do what they do. His theoretical framework takes into account a person’s agency (habitus), the structures they function within (field), and the resources they have available to them (capital).

Bourdieu defined field as the social structures in which individuals operate within and across on a daily basis. These structures produce, and have been produced by, and within, a historical context. An individual’s interaction with a field produces beliefs, values, perceptions and dispositions related to the field. Bourdieu defined this as a person’s habitus. An individual’s habitus guides how they interact with the field and view the field. It also produces a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1990, p. 66), which guides how, when and if a person will interact within various fields. Within each field are various forms of capital (i.e., economic, social and cultural) which agents struggle to accumulate and control. Individuals will engage a field differently accordingly to the capital they have accumulated which shapes their disposition or habitus. Though Bourdieu identified and defined various forms of “capital,” he noted that fields and the agents who inhabit them define what is perceived as valuable and exchangeable capital within that field. What may be constituted as valuable capital by one field may not be transferrable to another. Individuals or agents are in constant struggle for the accumulation and control of capital while inhabiting a field.

In order to understand a person’s social practice you must investigate how all of
these “theoretical tools” converge at the moment of decision-making. To fully comprehend Bourdieu theoretical framework of practice, each of the “theoretical technologies” must be explained in detail separately and how they function together. Capital will be examined first.

*Capital*

One of Bourdieu’s theoretical technologies, which has been used extensively, is *capital*. Bourdieu (1986) first conceptualized *capital* in three fundamental “guises” or “species” which he labeled as economic, social and cultural. *Capital* is defined, accumulated, exchanged and functions within a larger social structure or what he described as a *field*. Bourdieu stated that the value of *capital* hinged “on the existence of a game, of a field in which this competency can be employed” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). There are some instances where *capital* is transferrable between various *fields*, but there are also instances when *capital* does not hold the same value in various *fields*. Those who have accumulated and possess the majority of *capital* within a specific *field* possess power and control over that *field* and are able to define the value of *capital* within that *field*. They are also able to exert and “wield” their power and influence over all others who function within the *field*. They are also in control of when, if and how *capital* is distributed within the *field*. Those who have accrued the least amount of *capital* are in constant struggle to accumulate as much as they can, so they can amass more power and status within the *field* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). If accumulated and utilized accordingly, *capital* can be activated to provide access to resources, opportunities, social mobility and power, which in turn provides an advantage over others.

*Economic capital.* Bourdieu conceptualized *capital*, as an entity, which can be
possessed both in a materialized (i.e., economic capital) or in an embodied form (i.e. social and cultural). Bourdieu suggest that in capitalist societies, such as the United States, economic capital is held in the highest regard and is highly sought after. Bourdieu (1986) defined economic capital as “capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights” (p.243). Bourdieu argued economic capital was highly sought after because it was a “root” or “gateway” to other forms of capital, such as cultural and social capital. He believed that these other forms of capital are in fact just “transformed, disguised forms of economic capital” (Bourdieu, 1986). It is after all economic capital that makes possible the opportunity to “invest” in the accumulation of other forms of capital. Bourdieu also believed that economic capital was the most stable and transferrable form of capital one could accumulate. Economic capital has a universal material value or currency, which is commonly accepted and recognized throughout various societies, whereas the other forms of capital (i.e. cultural and social) may not be valued and recognized by individuals from different cultures, societies or fields. Therefore, for Bourdieu economic capital is easier to accumulate, manage, transfer, calculate and define than any other form of capital, because of its universal value.

Jean Anyon (1997, 2005) analyze policies that affect underserved students in urban schools through the lens of economic capital, which she identified as political economy. Anyon (2005) states that educators and researchers “need to significantly improve economic opportunities and conditions in low-income urban neighborhoods in order to provide infrastructural support that will nurture systematic, long-term school reform” (p. 111). She argued that economic policies and the lack of access to significant
economic capital are at the root of the educational disparity which plague inner city schools and neighborhoods. According to Anyon, these issues will continue to exist as long as the current federal economic polices continue to exist. Anyon (1997) goes on to state that "if we do not resuscitate our cities, we face an impossible situation regarding school reform: Attempting to fix inner-city schools without fixing the city in which they are embedded is like trying to clean the air on one side of a screen door" (p. 168). For Anyon economic capital has helped to dictate education policy within urban schools. She believes that “unless we make some changes in the way the macroeconomy works, economic policy will trump not only urban school reform but the individual educational achievement of urban students as well” (Anyon, 2005, p. 29). In her work, Anyon illustrates the power of economic capital and its deep connection to political capital and how not possessing both could negatively shape the reality of low-income students. The lack of economic and political capital leads to less resources and opportunities for low-income students of color.

Economic capital can manifest itself as a barrier or a resource for Latino students trying to access college. For example, economic capital can be viewed as a barrier because attending college costs money. The greater the prestige of the university or college, the more it generally costs to attend. Many students may not have the economic capital to attend college, making access difficult. But economic capital can be a resource as well. Because Latinos are disproportionately poor, many are eligible for financial aid. Access to federal, state and private financial aid provide some Latino students with a financial opportunity to attend college.

Various scholars discuss the impact of financial aid on communities of color, with
some specifically focusing on Latinos. The literature on financial aid for college attendance falls into the following categories:

- The knowledge both students and parents have about the cost of college and financial aid as a whole (Grodsky & Jones, 2004; Horn, Chen & Chapman, 2003; Long, 2004; Zarate & Pachon, 2006);
- How students learn about financial aid (Horn, Chen & Chapman, 2003; Luna De La Rosa, 2006; Perna, 2004; Terenzini, Cabrera & Bernal, 2001; Vargas, 2004; Venagas, 2006);
- When students learn about financial aid (Choy, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2006; Heller, 2006; Perna, 2004);
- How awareness and perception of financial aid and cost of college affect college going behavior (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Teran, 2007; Zarate & Pachon, 2006), and;
- The barriers to accessing financial aid (Fitzgerald, 2006; Heller, 2006; Titus, 2006).

For the majority of low-income students of color, the cost of college and availability to financial aid are the biggest concern when discussing college access. Many students, along with their families, are unaware of the types of financial aid and how to access it. This lack of understanding about financial aid coupled with the lack of resources to properly educate these communities create barriers to higher education. Many Latinos face a double dilemma when it comes to accessing financial aid. Because of immigration status, some Latino students and their families, even if they did possess the knowledge and were financially eligible for aid, may not qualify for this aid. This is
the reality for millions of Latino students in this country. Economics is one way that
capital manifests itself for Latinos, another is through culture.

*Cultural Capital.* Bourdieu (1986) developed *cultural capital* as a tool to examine
the reproduction of social stratification within society. His intent was to examine if, and
how, culture had an impact on class systems. Bourdieu suggest that culture upholds and
transmits within certain social institutions, specifically schools, class inequality. This is
possible because culture, as explained by Bourdieu, is transmitted as a *capital*, which
exists in three different forms — the embodied state, the objectified state, and the
institutionalized state.

*Embodied cultural capital* exists in long-lasting dispositions of the mind and
body. This is what is most commonly known as culture or general cultural awareness and
knowledge, which are transmitted through interactions with people from social circles
who you commonly interact with. Bourdieu argues these social interactions provide
individuals with an embodiment of attributes, language skills and cultural knowledge,
which define their social class. Those with middle-class, upper- middle class, and upper
class attributes are regarded as possessing the most valued *cultural capital*. In Bourdieu’s
construct, the lack of *cultural capital* can prevent social mobility. The accumulation and
embodiment of *cultural capital* takes place over a long period of time and is acquired
unconsciously. Individuals or agents embody a cultural disposition and act it out in their
choice of daily cultural activities. These cultural activities are what Bourdieu defines as
the *objectified state* of *cultural capital*.

*Objectified forms of cultural capital* live outside the body and are the cultural
goods one accumulates over a period of time. One must possess the proper embodied
cultural capital to fully appreciate objectified cultural capital. The value of those goods or items the agent consumes or accumulates can only be recognized through the embodied state of perception. An individual’s taste and consumption of various books, writings, artwork, and music would all be examples of how cultural capital is objectified.

Bourdieu describes this accumulation of objectified cultural capital as a person’s “taste”. The “taste” in goods an individual consumes provides social cues to a person’s social class. If an individual consumes objects with a perceived higher cultural value, then they are believed to have more cultural capital and therefore occupy a higher social class.

Bourdieu also believes that institutional credentials an individual accumulates could also be a predictor of social class and cultural capital. He defines this as the institutionalized state of cultural capital.

The institutionalized state of cultural capital consists of the academic qualifications and credentials individuals achieve and accumulate over their lifespan. The value of these qualifications and credentials are transferrable within the open labor market and can be exchanged for the opportunity to acquire other forms of capital, mainly economic capital. Bourdieu (1986) states:

This product of the conversion of economic capital into cultural capital establishes the value, in terms of cultural capital, of the holder of a given qualification relative to other qualification holders and, by the same token, the monetary value for which it can be exchanged on the labor market. (p. 248)

Hence, those who attend educational institutions that are held in the highest regard within society are viewed as receiving an education that has more value. This has value on the “open market” and may provide the opportunity of exchange because of the universally recognized value of this institutional cultural capital. A degree from Harvard is more
easily convertible to *economic capital* and opportunity because of its universally recognized cultural value or as Bourdieu defines it, *institutionalized cultural capital*.

Culture and *cultural capital* has been utilized by scholars and researchers in an attempt to explain the achievement gap which exist in education for many low-class students and students of color (Behnke, Piercy & Diversi, 2004; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Dumais, 2002; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lamont & Lareau, 1987, 2001, Yosso, 2005). Lamont and Lareau (1988) discuss the importance of *cultural capital*, but also its shortcomings. They expand on Bourdieu’s concept by proposing a new definition of *cultural capital*, which is more inclusionary and focuses on cultural and social exclusion. Their critique of Bourdieu’s work, similar to others, is that it only recognizes the capital possessed in cultures that are viewed as possessing high status, and it was originally designed to analyze the structural system of France. To address these shortcomings, the model proposed by Lamont and Lareau legitimates all cultures and is easier adaptable to American cultural institutions. In order to use *cultural capital* as a tool for analysis, researchers will have to be aware of high status signals (attitudes, preferences, behaviors, and goods) and how they are being used in a manner of direct or indirect social and cultural exclusion.

Other scholars have also challenged the tenets of *cultural capital* and its use in examining American culture, especially when analyzing the educational experience of students of color. In *Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth*, Yosso (2005) argues that scholars have misappropriated Bourdieu’s theory of *cultural capital*. She asserts that researchers’ narrow conceptualizations of *cultural capital* fail to account for the “knowledge, skills, abilities
and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). She believes that *cultural capital* utilized in its current form does not capture the capital possessed and employed by communities of color. She argues that Bourdieu’s theory of *cultural capital* only recognizes dominant culture, namely white and Caucasian culture and values, as capital. She calls for the utilization of a new framework, which captures and incorporates the capital utilized in communities of color. She defines this framework as *community cultural wealth (CCW)*.

Yosso’s (2005) framework of CCW incorporates six forms of capital: aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant and social capital.

1. *Aspirational capital* refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived barriers.
2. *Familial capital* refers to the cultural knowledge nurtured among familia [kin] that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition.
3. *Linguistic capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style.
4. *Navigational capital* refers to the skills of maneuvering through social institutions.
5. *Resistant capital* refers to the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.
6. *Social capital* can be understood as networks of people and community resources.

Yosso’s framework builds upon Bourdieu’s theoretical technology of *cultural capital* and includes the voices, struggles and capital found within communities of color.
A number of scholars (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Freeman, 1997; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs & Rhee, 1997; McDonough, Nora, 2004; Perna, 2000) have used culture and cultural capital to explain the absence of Latinos and students of color within higher education. For example, Barajas and Peirce (2001) discuss the significance of race and gender in school success among Latina and Latino college students. In their work they discuss the importance of a “cultural translator.” They build upon de Anda’s (1984) work, which defines and views cultural translators as an influential resource in college success for students of color. Barajas and Pierce’s work expands the use of cultural translators and apply it to Latino students. They define a cultural translator as a person who is able to “pass on information about their own experiences and the knowledge of the dominant, white, middle-class culture to help students of color succeed and achieve a bicultural identity” (p.863). These cultural translators are able to teach students of color how to survive in various environments without compromising their culture and identity. This knowledge is usually passed on to students through shared experience, through words of wisdom or stories, or in instances where cultural translators share their own experience within various contexts. The students, in turn, are able to learn and apply these learned strategies of survival in their own experiences. Cultural translators usually occupy the positions of teachers, professors, guidance counselors, or older peers. Those who are able to find and connect with cultural translators are most likely to become bicultural and are able to survive at higher rates within higher education. Those who rely on what de Anda identifies as “models” of the dominant group will have a tougher time navigating these environments. These models are members of the dominant group who provide guidance and advice about various
environments to students of color. Though they have no ill will or bad intentions with their advice, these students aren’t provided with the proper bicultural skill set to survive. Barajas and Pierce’s framework of cultural translator illustrate how cultural capital is needed in the embodied state in order to live within the institutional state.

Though cultural capital can be utilized as a tool to examine the possible barriers and resources for Latino male students as they attempt to access higher education, it is still very limited and only has the ability to paint a partial picture. Many scholars utilize cultural capital as a theoretical framework to examine underserved populations in an attempt to explain the academic disparity. But was this Bourdieu’s intention when he developed this tool? Can we examine culture as a form of capital and its affects on social practice without analyzing and incorporating Bourdieu’s other tools?

**Social Capital.** Bourdieu (1986) first viewed social capital as the individual social obligations or “connections,” and their membership within certain networks. Bourdieu believed that these networks if activated and utilized properly could provide opportunity to other forms of capital. The activation and volume of social capital possessed by an individual is dependent on their social position and the amount of capital held by the individual within the network they are embedded within. Social capital and economic capital in many instances work hand in hand. Those individuals with the largest, most dense and influential social networks are in many cases those individuals with the most economic resources. Though those with fewer resources are embedded in networks with fewer resources, less influence and little connection to other forms of defined and valued capital. Everyone is in possession of social capital, but it is up to the individual to activate it. Previous studies (Contreras, 2005; De Jesús, 2005; Farmer-
Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Perna & Titus, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2004; Valenzula, 1999) have used social capital as a theoretical framework to explain educational disparities for underserved and Latino students. These studies have explored the impact of academic success and achievement based on the amount of social capital and how it is activated.

Stanton- Salazar (1997, 2004) uses the theoretical tool of social capital and peer relations to investigate and interrogate Latinos and academic achievement. Stanton-Salazar (2004) defines social capital as:

Those ‘connections’ to individuals and to networks that can provide access to resources and forms of support that facilitate the accomplishments of goals- has informed the study of family dynamics, the social organization of business enclaves, immigrant settlement experiences, public health, career advancement among middle-class men, youth intervention, democracy and governance-increasingly, schooling and education. (p. 18)

Stanton- Salazar argues that social capital plays a significant role in student achievement, because it provides access to “goals”. He suggests social capital — as captured through a wide variety of measures — has been shown to influence academic achievement. He argues that social capital in familial domains has been particularly prominent in studies of academic achievement, with the focus on family structure, parent-child discussions, and parent school involvement. He contends that despite Latino student’s class status, they are embedded within social networks, which can support their academic success. He insists that social capital for working class students provides access to opportunities, which in turn may help them to achieve their goals.

Stanton-Salazar argues the social capital possessed by students through peer relations influence student achievement in a positive manner more than any other type of
Students are exposed to social capital at a young age, mainly through their families and the networks in which student’s families are associated. He contends that “close relations or "connections" with parents, school personnel, and peers each play a potentially key role through socialization processes that help shape a pro-academic identity and that facilitate adherence to the educational system's moral order and ideological foundations” (Stanton-Salazar, 2004 pg. 22). These social forces help to structure the identity of students and in so doing provide guidance and adherence to the educational system.

Positive social capital within academic frameworks has mainly been associated with high achieving middle and upper class students. Stanton-Salazar argues that working middle class students also possess social capital and are able to access it. Though the living and educational conditions of working class students may have a debilitating effect, these students are located within social capital rich networks that they may access in order to uplift their conditions. When utilizing social capital to examine college choice, access and transition scholars have posited that students of color do not have access to formal and informal networks, which can offer the “proper” social capital for this transition. Their rationale is that in order for the college transition to take place successfully, students must have access to information about the process.

Ream (2003) used mixed-methods to investigate the connection between social capital and Mexican-American achievement. Ream illustrates how the information gained within students’ social networks could have a positive impact on their mobility on educational achievement, but he also identified how this may have a detrimental impact. He defines this detrimental impact as a “counterfeit” social capital. He states that this
transference of counterfeit social capital takes place in circumstances where “school personnel offer patronizing forms of social support directed less toward Mexican-American academic achievement than towards a kind of social expediency in the classroom” (p. 252). In his study Ream found there were cases where teachers were more concerned about maintaining a positive and harmonious classroom environment. This harmony was at the expense of academic achievement. Some teachers would go “easy” on students and not push them academically in order to have a classroom that was well behaved and less disruptive. This was at the expense of those well-behaved students who were capable of more rigorous academic work and in turn affected their test scores and overall performance. These social connections with teachers, in the form of social capital, potentially had a negative effect on students’ performance, which in turn provided them with less academic mobility. Though Ream illustrates how social capital may have a negative impact on students, most of the literature concerning social capital and its impact on Latino students’ access to higher education argues its potential.

Person and Rosenbaum (2006) utilize chain migration as a way to frame why some Latino students apply and eventually attend specific colleges. Their use of chain migration is an extension of MacDonald and MacDonald (1974) conceptualization. MacDonald and MacDonald view chain migration as a “phenomenon whereby kinship, friendship, and client ties result in the migration to the same destination by network members” (p.52). When applying this model to the college decision-making process of Latino students, Person and Rosenbaum (2006) argue that Latino students were most likely to apply to, and attend, colleges about which they have received information through their social network. This includes either knowing people who have previously
attended a particular institution or knowing someone who is currently attending the institution. This heavy reliance on their social networks leave them limited in their options and also in their college experience, since they often do not associate with people outside of their network.

Perez and McDonough (2008) expanded on the work of Person and Rosenbaum (2006) to examine the college choice process of Latino students. By combining an immigration analysis and social capital framework Perez and McDonough (2008) were able to focus in depth on the role social networks play on Latino student’s college choice process. Their findings coincided with previous studies (e.g., Ceja, 2001; Gándara, 1993, 1995), which found that Latino students often rely heavily on family and friends for college information. They also found that the college choice process for Latinos was “not a linear one, nor is it necessarily predictable” (p.260). In contrast, some studies (e.g., Choy, Horn, Nunez and Chen, 2000; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999), present college choice as a process that follows “neat” steps, which flow into each other. Perez and McDonough (2008) argue that this is not always the case. There are other factors such as cost of attendance and culture, which play a role in the college choice process for Latino students.

González, Stoner and Jovel (2003) examined the role social capital played in the access of college for Latinas. They looked specifically at how their experiences in primary and secondary school influence their decision to pursue higher education. This study highlighted the various types of agents and the amount of social capital accessible to Latina students as they attempted to make the transition to college. They identified social agents, social capital, and networks, utilizing Stanton-Salazar’s (1997) construct...
as “people or structures that have the capacity to transmit directly resources and opportunities” (p.148). These included parents, siblings, school-based honors programs, teachers, counselors, specialized programs, and peers. These agents provided knowledge and were able to steer students towards opportunities to access higher education.

Gonzalez, Stoner and Jovel (2003) also identified what they labeled as “institutional neglect and abuse,” which created barriers to higher education. They defined institutional neglect as “the inability or unwillingness of schools or their personnel to prepare students for postsecondary education, particularly 4-year institutions” (p.153). They go on to define institutional abuse as “those actions by institutional agents that discourage or produce barriers for college attendance” (p.153). Some of the social agents that produced this institutional neglect and abuse were the teachers and counselors. Teachers and counselors in this case were both responsible for providing social capital and institutional neglect and abuse. This institutional neglect and abuse is similar to Ream’s notion of counterfeit social capital.

Contreras (2005) examined the transference of social capital in reference to high school students taking standardized test and AP courses over a 10-year period, from 1993-2003. She examined differences in achievement between Latino and White students in regard to access and performance on SAT and AP courses. She believed the lack of achievement existed if the role of both social and cultural capital were not “fully explored and assessed as a potential point of intervention and community responsibility” (p.199). Latino students performed lower in all achievement indicators (G.P.A, performance on SAT Math I, SAT Verbal I, as well as enrollment and completion in AP courses) as opposed to their white counterparts. Though test scores of Latinos rose and the
enrollment in AP course doubled within the time frame investigated, Latinos were still consistently performing at a lower level and had less access to resources. Contreras (2005) argues that more exposure and access to more resources for Latino students would improve the likelihood of an increase in the cultural capital needed to succeed, as well as the possibility of informal and formal social capital opportunities.

Perna and Titus (2005) examined the relationship of parental involvement as social capital in college enrollment. They examined various racial groups within their study to see if there was a positive correlation between parental involvement and college access. Perna and Titus (2005) build upon research, which states there is a higher likelihood of college aspirations and college access when there is parental involvement (e.g., Cabrera & De La Nasa, 2000; Horn, 1998; Hossler, Braxton & Cooper-Smith, 1989; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Perna, 2000). Perna and Titus (2005) examined various types of parental involvement, which may have a positive or negative influence on college aspirations and access. They found that when parents talk to their children and school personnel about their children’s progress academically in school, or volunteer in the school where their children attend, college aspirations and enrollment increased. In contrast, they also found that when parents mainly had conversation about behavior, the students’ likelihood to aspire or access higher education was decreased. They also found that students whose peers had aspirations to attend a 2-yr college, had a higher likelihood of attending a 2-yr college. Their likelihood to attend a 4-yr college was influenced in a negative way. Perna & Titus’ study showed that the likelihood of enrolling in, and aspiring to, college had a positive correlation with the volume of resources made available to students via their social networks, which included both parents, peers and
Social capital has been a useful tool in analyzing academic achievement and access to higher education for Latinos. There is little literature that examines the social network of Latino males and its influence on their access and aspiration towards higher education. However, although social capital is a useful tool, like cultural capital it does not provide a complete explanation as to why Latino males are not accessing higher education at higher rates. Networks can be both barriers or resources for Latino students in their pursuit of higher education. The use of social capital as a theoretical framework is limited and in many instances is not utilized as Bourdieu suggest.

**Bourdieu’s concept of capital and my dissertation**

Economic, cultural, and social capital interact in ways that build both barriers and possible resources. In the case of Latino male students making the transition from high school to college, capital plays an important role. The literature, however, is scant. Furthermore, there are few studies that look at the impact of capital in this process. This study will precisely fill this content gap. Additionally, using Bourdieu’s concept of capital is a theoretical innovation in the literature on the education of Latinos, and of Latino males in particular. The next section reviews Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, especially as used in the educational literature, and that concerning Latinos and Latino males.

**Habitus**

Habitus as defined by Bourdieu (1977b, 1990) is a system of durable, transposable dispositions, which produce and generate a set of values, beliefs, perceptions, and rules which not only provides a basis of interacting with the social world
but also a way to perceive it. The *habitus* is embedded at an unconscious or partially unconscious level within individuals and produces dispositions that reflect conscious actions. Bourdieu (1977b, 1990) defined these conscious actions as a person’s *practice*. As Maton (2008) states “practices are thus not simply the result of one’s habitus but rather of the relations between one’s habitus and one’s current circumstance” (p.51).

Thus the *habitus* is the interplay between the social world, all of its structures, or *fields*, the individual and the consequences, which is produced by this interaction. The agent or individual interacts with, across, and is embedded within multiple social *fields*. As individuals interact with these *fields*, their *habitus* incorporates the values, beliefs and expectations of each of those fields. The interactions within social *fields* are perceived as “favorable” or “unfavorable”, depending on the outcome. Each interaction constructs a history of the experience, which is embodied in the individual in the form of a *habitus*. These past experiences help to shape the present and future interactions individuals have with what they perceive as the same or a similar social *field*.

Though the *habitus* helps to shape the present and future reality of agents, the *habitus* is not static and is produced by the lived experiences of the individual, which evolves over time. The habitus at times may be perceived as a structured structure, which re-produces itself over time, as a schematic prison constructed by past experiences, which individuals cannot escape. The *habitus* is just the opposite. At times the *habitus* can re-produce itself and limits how the individual interacts with the social world, but the *habitus* can also do the contrary. The *habitus* is always subject to modification. *Habitus* is not passively constructed but constantly changing based on the interaction between social fields and the outcomes of those interactions. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) states:
Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, p. 133)

The *habitus* can be viewed as a schematic coping mechanism developed within agents over time based on the history of past experiences. It helps individuals deal with an ever-changing social world and with unexpected future situations.

Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) identify four facets of the *habitus*. First they state the knowledge of the world we live in is constructed and instructed through the *habitus*, rather than being passively recorded. Second, individuals are inclined to attitudes, values and certain behavior because of the “influence exerted by our cultural trajectories. These dispositions are transposable across fields” (p.38). The *habitus* is, and can be, utilized across various fields, but the outcome is not necessarily the same.

Thirdly, the *habitus* is “constituted in moments of practice”. A person’s *habitus* is best understood in moments when a set of dispositions and a particular problem meet. The choices the individual makes at that moment give insight into their *habitus*, and can be traced back to how it was constructed. Finally Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) state that the *habitus* “operates at a level that is at least partly unconscious” (p.38). As mentioned previously, though the habitus has conscious actions and consequences on daily experiences, most of the time individuals are not aware of their *habitus* and how it influences their lived experience. When daily decisions are made, individuals do not have much time to contemplate their choices about the decision they make. They do what comes “natural” to them, and this is the exact moment when the *habitus* and *practice* meet.
A review of the literature provides examples where *habitus* manifests itself in various ways. There are five themes that emerge in the literature as to how low income and Latino students enact a *habitus* in connection to their education:

1. Coping (Gloria, Castellanos & Orozco, 2005; Phinney & Hass, 2003);
2. Ethnic perception (Hurtado, Garcia, Vega & Gonzalez, 2003; Mutute- Bianchi, 1986; Okagaki, Frensch & Dodson, 1996);
3. Aspirations (Gloria, Catellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005; Kao & Thompson, 2003);
4. Resistance (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Camorota, 2004; 2008; Cavazos et al., 2010; O’Connor, 1997); and.

A critical review of the literature will be provided for three of the five themes above: coping, resistance and college choice. These are the most significant.

**Coping**

The coping literature provides insight into the strategies students develop in order to engage and overcome various barriers. Most of the coping literature is based on the discipline of psychology. Phinney and Haas (2003) describe how ethnic minorities cope with the struggles of being a first generation college student. Similar to Bourdieu’s theoretical tool of habitus, they suggest that individuals produce coping strategies and these strategies change based on the context, and the amount of stress or anxiety. In their study they addressed “the issue of how situational factors, social support, and personal
characteristics contribute to successful coping” (p.708). In their responses, the students supplied a written narrative describing a stressful situation — either academic, family or personal. They then had to relate in writing the way they dealt with this stress, and the resources they utilized. By collecting this data they were trying to measure various levels of students’ self-efficacy and general self-efficacy. They define self-efficacy as “the belief in one’s ability to execute behavior that is necessary to achieve a specific outcome” (p.711). Phinney and Haas (2003) define general self-efficacy as “a broad set of expectations of success in new situations” (p.711). They built upon previous research (Milton, Brown, & Lent, 1991), which suggests that self-efficacy is an important factor in both academic performance and persistence. Phinney and Haas argue, as do Solberg and Villarreal (1997), that the higher levels of self-efficacy possessed by students make adjustment to college easier. In gathering their data, Phinney and Haas provided students with six categories to gauge how they coped with situations:

1. **A proactive approach** in which students did something on their own to try to solve the problem.

2. **Seeking support** which involved students trying to do something about the issue but with someone else’s help.

3. **Distance and avoidance**, which involved students in distancing themselves from the problem so they can return to it later when they have had time to refresh themselves.

4. **Acceptance of the problem** as part of life and about which nothing can be done.

5. **Positive reframing** which involved students looking at the problem in a
positive way

6. Not coping at all.

Students rated #2, seeking support, as the most successful coping strategy. This was in contrast to other studies which stated that proactive coping rather than seeking support was a more positive coping strategy for first generation college students. Though this article was here reviewed to provide an illustration of habitus, we can see how the interaction of habitus and social capital can play a positive role in the transition to college for Latino students.

Resistance

Cammarota (2004, 2008) investigates Latino students and academic pathways. He examines the academic pathways and persistence of both Latinas and Latinos within an urban context. What he found was Latinas used education as a form of resistance or social and cultural expectations. Their mode of resistance was centered on “graduating and being the first in their family to receive a high school diploma, a credential that would mark a status change for them among men and women in the home, community and society at large” (2004, p.54). The women in his study bought into the notion of schooling as a mode of upward mobility. They saw education and schooling as a means of resisting and pushing back against a Latino identity that had been constructed and forced upon them. In contrast, for the males, schooling and education provided a different social experience, which caused them to resist in a different manner. Males felt as if they were policed and constantly harassed within many social contexts, which included schools and neighborhoods. The best way to resist against this negative treatment was to cut class, withdraw and not interact within these environments.
Cammarota’s work challenges a large amount of resistance theory literature (Fordham 1996; MacLeod 1987; MacLaren 1994; Willis 1977), which views achievement as an act of conformity. He tries to build upon and challenge these theories by viewing achievement as an act of *resistance and transformation*. Cammorota’s work extends what Solórzano and Bernal (2001) labeled *conformist or transformational resistance*, what Valenzuela (1999) labeled *positive resistance*, and what Yosso (2002) labeled a “prove them wrong” *perspective*. Latino students, and specificallyLatinas, utilize their achievement within the educational system as a form of resistance, and yet, their achievement did little to immediately challenge the social structures around them. Their disposition of the educational system and how they utilized it was formed through their life experiences. The constant policing and negative attention provided by schooling made the Latino male students reject school and avoid it. This type of negative attention was constant for Latinos in all social contexts. In contrast, Latinas reported that their experience with schooling was not as negative and thus they saw schooling as a means of upward mobility and acceptance within the larger community.

*College choice*

For many students, the decision to attend college is the first time in their educational trajectory when they have the opportunity to exercise their “agency.” For some, the transition to college may be perceived as a natural progression and as conscious next step, but for others this may not be the case. A student’s perception of college and their “buying” into the necessity of college as a vehicle for upward mobility is developed over a period of time. The intersection of *habitus* and *practice*, in regard to higher education, is best illustrated during the college application process.
The college application process takes place over an extended period of time (Choy, Horn, Nunez & Chen, 2000; Hossler, Schmit and Vesper, 1999). Hossler, et al. (1999), identified and condenses the college application process into three steps (predisposition, search and choice). In this model, students must first have a positive predisposition toward attending college, which they define as the predisposition step. This predisposition manifests itself during various periods in high school and drives their aspiration to want to attend. The predisposition stage accounts for students’ family background, academic performance, peers, and high school experiences as factors, which shape this disposition. In order for students to think of college as a realistic option, they must have a positive disposition about and towards college. This is a crucial step and is what drives the students to follow through with the following steps.

Once students possess a positive disposition towards college, they begin the search stage. During this stage Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) suggest that students’ begin discovering and evaluating possible colleges in which to enroll. Students start to explore various colleges and begin to evaluate whether or not they may fit within those institutions. College’s academic and social reputation, distance and cost start to become scrutinized and students begin to evaluate whether or not they may want to apply. Students start to research by reading various college propaganda, speaking to various individuals, and visiting schools to begin to get a “feel” for the institutions. Once students have muddled through the various colleges they are considering, they begin to apply and wait for responses from the institutions. Students apply to an assortment of schools and weigh their options for acceptance. Many factors drive this process, but ultimately the students’ disposition toward college is what guides their research and eventual
submission of an admissions application to these institutions. Once the students have completed their application, it becomes a waiting game.

The final step identified in Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) model is the choice stage. After admission applications have been submitted, students begin to receive notices of their application status. Students will either be wait-listed, accepted, or declined admission. Some students will be accepted to multiple colleges they apply to, and some will be declined from the majority. Students will then begin the process of deciding which institution they will attend. Many factors come into play during this stage — distance, reputation, peers, family, cost. For many, financial aid packages will play a key role as to which institution a student eventually decides to attend. Once a decision has been made, students begin the process of sending the appropriate documents to the school of their choice to reserve their place within the entering class.

Many researchers investigating college choice and access have frequently adopted this framework. A review of the literature has uncovered a second emerging framework suggested by Choy, Horn, Nuñez and Chen (2000). This framework is similar to the Hossler, Schmit and Vesper model described above, but incorporates a five-step model rather than a three-step. The five steps are: aspiration, academics, admission process, application, and acceptance. The aspiration step deals with the students’ perceptions, disposition and developing view of college and whether or not they feel college is a viable next step in their educational trajectory. This is when students start to contemplate whether or not they want to go to college. This step incorporates both college aspirations as well as the analysis of their academic performance in an attempt to evaluate if they are college eligible. Aspirations and academics are separated into two separate steps. The
same is done with the admission process and application process. The Choy et al. model serves as a better framework for my proposed study because the college transition process is a physically and emotionally long process, which transpires over the course of several months. Students jump through many hurdles as they attempt to make this transition. The Choy et al., framework, captures this best.

Many students view the college transition as a next step in their educational careers, but for some this choice may not be so clear-cut. Various factors come into play and shape how they perceive this transition. Some students just don’t want to attend college and have a negative disposition towards it. These dispositions develop over time and may be produced by doubt, family responsibility, cost, and an evaluation of whether or not college is “necessary”. This disposition may be also created by the social structures in which students engage with on a daily basis. Students’ disposition about college is embodied within the student and begins to emerge as the transition nears and college becomes more of a “reality”. This disposition towards college begins to materialize in the form of aspirations, perceptions, and social practices towards making the college transition.

**Bourdieu’s concept of Habitus and this dissertation**

As we have seen, the concept of habitus can result in both barriers and possible resources. In the case of Latino male students making the transition from high school to college, habitus has an important impact. The literature, however, is scant. Furthermore, there are few studies that look at the impact of capital in this process. My dissertation will precisely fill this content gap. Additionally, using Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is a theoretical innovation in the literature on the education of Latinos, and of Latino males in
particular. The next section reviews Bourdieu’s concept of field, especially as used in the educational literature, and that concerning Latinos and Latino males.

Field

Bourdieu (1990) defined a field as a “dynamic social arena where exchanges and struggles take place involving particular forms of capital” (p.67). Bourdieu’s “theoretical technology” of field is what is most commonly referred to as a social structure or cultural field. Within Bourdieu’s theory, agents or individuals, occupy multiple or a variety of fields at any given time. Agents engage within and across multiple fields and sometimes these fields intersect with one another. As Bourdieu (1990) states “multiple fields overlap and are interrelated to make up the larger society, or social space” (p.67). There are multiple fields that agents engage in on a daily basis and over their lifetime. These fields begin to construct the social reality of each person who occupies these spaces. Bourdieu believes that the boundaries and reach of each field are fluid and agents could enter into and out of a field at any given time. Fluidity within and through fields relies on the amount of capital an agent possesses. More capital translates into a higher social position within the field, and the higher your social position the more movement and fluidity one has when negotiating fields.

The overall purpose of occupation within a field is to acquire capital. The field is where capital is defined, exchanged and accumulated. Capital cannot exist outside of a field because it is socially constructed and needs a context or boundary. Those in possession of the greatest amount of capital are the ones who are dominant within the field, define what is capital within the field, construct the rules within the field, and in essence shape the social reality of the occupants of the field. Bourdieu (1990) believes
that a **field** is defined by both the *capital* one must accumulate in order to occupy that field and also the social *practices* the field produces within it. In order to accumulate *capital* one must know how to go about doing so which is the social *practice* of the field, and one must build social relationships along the way. This will ensure the proper accumulation of *capital* and helps the agent maintain his or her position within the **field**.

Bourdieu argued that the **field** not only produced *capital*, but also is where the *habitus* is developed as well.

As mentioned previously, the *habitus* are a person’s beliefs, dispositions and perceptions embedded within agents and acted out in relation to a particular field. Bourdieu (1990; 1992) suggest that the *habitus* is constructed at the intersections of various social **fields** and may be “mutually supportive or contradictory” of those **fields** in many different ways. He believed that both the *habitus* and the **field** are continually produced and reproduced through a person’s social practice. Bourdieu (1990) notes that there could not be “a **field** (structure) separate from a *habitus* (agency), the two of which somehow get connected through *practice*” (p.66). The **field** is what generates the *habitus*, and at the same time the *habitus* is what produces and reproduces the **field**. You cannot have one separate from the other; both are needed in order to function. Without one, the other ceases to exist. Sewell (1992) discusses this dialectic or duality in his work.

Sewell’s (1992) work on the duality between structure and agency is a response to structuralism and its dominance in sociology. Like Bourdieu, Sewell (1992) believed that there is a duality that exists between structure and agency. Sewell (1992) argued that structures shape people’s practices, but it is also people’s practices that constitute and reproduce structures. Many believe that structure and agency are oppositional to each
other, but Sewell, like Bourdieu, believes that they are not in opposition to each other, but bonded together in a constant push and pull dialectic which creates a duality. Though Bourdieu and Sewell share some similarities in their explanation of structures and agency, what is absent from Sewell’s work which is critical to Bourdieu’s theory is capital, and how capital, along with field and habitus impacts a person’s social practice.

When explaining field, Bourdieu used the analogy of sports to paint a clearer picture of what he meant. Bourdieu suggest a social field shared many similarities to a field where sports are played. Each playing field designated for a particular sport has specific rules and norms, which govern the game. One would not walk onto a baseball diamond and try to play the game of baseball using the rules for basketball. The two are just incompatible. Most people learn how to play sports and learn the rules of the game through either passively watching the game unfold and incorporating what is viewed, or through the social interaction of playing it with other individuals. Various movements and strategies on the field where the game is played depends on your position on that field at that particular time, which is either assigned or achieved. Each player’s position has movements or strategies, which are defined and dependent on that position. A pitcher on a baseball diamond is responsible for pitching the ball to the batter of the opposing team. This position, the rules of that position, and how they interact on the field are dependent on the game. The ability and purpose of a pitcher on the baseball diamond is not transferrable to other games, because the objective of the position and how it is carried out is specific to the game where it is defined.

Sports are always played on the boundaries of the field. Though there is preparation for the game, and strategies are formulated for the game away from the field,
the actual game itself gets played within the boundaries of the field. The labels of “winners” and “losers” of the game are assigned to those players who play the game the best and the worse. This makes the game in itself competitive, since players do not want to be labeled as less than adequate. Within the game there are advantages, which allow for some of the players or teams to have an edge in competition. Some players or teams may have more height, speed, or athletic ability, which they use towards their advantage and in order to get a competitive edge over the competition to win. Players who are at a disadvantage try to acquire other skills or may work on other areas to compensate for their limitations so they can compete at a higher level. What is at stake within the field or game is capital, whether it be a championship, accolades, or awards. For many professional sports, the opportunity to turn skills into actual economic capital is the ultimate goal. There is no such thing as a “level” playing field within sports. When players enter their competitive field some already are at a competitive advantage before the game even starts. Some teams may have better players, a home field advantage, more economic capital to pay and recruit better players, have been trained better or have better coaching. There are teams, which consistently win championships, like the N.Y. Yankees in baseball or L.A. Lakers in basketball, and there are some, which have never won a championship like the Texas Rangers in baseball, the Utah Jazz in basketball. Those teams, which consistently win usually have more capital than other teams and use that capital to win and stay on top. Those teams, which have a competitive advantage, use it to keep their edge and their position as one of the elite teams in the sport.

The rules of the game have been socially constructed and change over time based on how the game has evolved. Words like “fairness” or “sportsmanship” are used to
legitimate these changes. Those players who occupy the field of play know of the rules of the game and know how to bend the rules for their advantage. Those players who are viewed as the best, play the game with a perceived “natural” ability or “instinctually.” There is no thinking prior to a specific move, just reactions based on the situation they face in front of them. Years of training and practice have made them feel natural on the field and their movements become “second nature.” If a move does not work for them over time and they are not achieving the same success with a particular move or strategy, players or teams will begin to acquire new moves and skills to ensure success.

Every game has a history and the players are, for the most part, aware of this history. Some may have more historical knowledge than others, but they are aware that the game is entrenched in some history, and for the most part they are respectful of that history. Bourdieu argues organized sports in many respects mirror the essence of social life. There are many parallels between athletic games and life, and in both cases those who know the rules of the game the best have the capital to excel at the game. Those who are able to bend or make the rules work for them are the ones who succeed.

There has been a great deal written in the field of Latinos and higher education. When using the word field in this context, I am talking about field in a Bourdieudian sense. In this regard, I am talking about all the external factors or outside structural forces that have either served as a barrier or resource to Latinos in their transition to higher education. The literature about the field of higher education and Latinos include the following topics:

§ The lack of academic preparedness of Latinos (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Boden, 2011; Cavazos, Johnson & Sparrow, 2010; Conchas, 2001; Crumb, 2010; Martinez,
DeGarmo & Eddy, 2004; Zalaquett, 2005);

§ The role of entrance exams (Gandara & Lopez, 1998);

§ Institutional racism (Figueroa & Garcia, 2006);

§ The role of Latino parents and family characteristics (Auerbach, 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Behnke, Piercy & Diversi, 2004; Buchman & DiPrete, 2006; Cebello, 2004; Hossler and Stage, 1992; Hugh et. al., 2006; ); and

§ Low expectations and lack of opportunities (Cavazos & Cavazos, 2010).

All of these factors fall in the category of field because they are outside structural forces that may or may not have an effect on Latino students’ access and persistence within higher education. One of the most mentioned factors is the academic under preparedness of Latinos.

Gándara and Contreras (2009) track how Latinos have been failed by the educational system and its policies. They document how Latinos have consistently performed at lower levels academically than every other racial group in the U.S. Latino students are faced with poorer school facilities, inadequate curricula, less skilled teachers and school leaders, overcrowded classrooms, and less access to technology and specialized programs. The combination of all these inadequacies have resulted in Latino students performing poorly and having less access to college. These disparities have not only caught the eyes of scholars but of government officials as well.

In April of 2011 the Obama administration released a report entitled “Winning the Future: Improving the Education of the Latino Community.” In this report the Obama administration recognized the disparities of academic achievement among Latinos and outlined federal policies that could strengthen Latino academic success. One of the most
important ways to improve the educational experience of Latinos is to provide early support, including head start programs and improved childcare. The report suggest that providing more funding, access and resources to early education programs would provide a solid foundation for future years.

The report also emphasized improved classroom environments and curricula for Latino students, especially in math and science. It also outlines various strategies to provide support for community based organizations (CBO) that serve Latinos. Expert teachers for Latino students also have to be recruited, and a website was established. Finally, access to higher education for Latinos must be improved.

Two main strategies are outlined in the report for increasing access to higher education. The first is to increase financial aid for Latino students. More Pell grants, state aid and loan opportunities would allow Latino students to afford college. The report also makes mention of strengthening the community college to 4-yr college pipeline, highlighting that the majority of Latino students’ access higher education first through community college.

In 2010 The College Board released the first of two reports, which focused on young men of color and their educational achievement. The first report titled “The Educational Crisis Facing Young Men of Color” highlights the educational disparities of young men not only in higher education, but also within K-12 education. The report summarizes data collected through focus groups with students of color and experts in the field. Eight themes were identified as reasons why young men of color are not performing academically:

1. Low expectations by teachers and the resulting low academic achievement
was identified as the main reason for their educational crisis.

2. Being a minority male with social expectations of being “macho” or “cool” was also influential.

3. There is a lack of positive role models and black educated males were not respected in their communities, since respect was offered in the performance of masculinity.

4. The importance of cultural memory and minority pride would have to be reshaped so as to pass down a history that portrays young men of color in a positive light.

5. Many men of color grow up in poverty and struggle with all the inequalities that accompany it. These issues must be addressed if young men of color are expected to move forward.

6. Schools and colleges are failing young men of color because of lack of resources and opportunities, and poor teaching and low expectations by institutions.

7. There has not been a collective effort by schools and communities to address these issues.

The report also provides statistics pertaining to young men of color and education, highlighting the disparities in high school completion rate, college enrollment rates and completion, compared to white males and females. These statistics have been utilized in the introduction of my analysis. Finally, the report focuses on resources needed in community-based organizations, schools, and colleges. Programs such as the Harlem Children Zone, Eagle Academy, and the Hispanic Scholarship fund are mentioned as
important.

The follow-up report titled “The Education Experience of Young Men of Color: A Review of Research, Pathways and Progress” (The College Board, 2011) provides six recommendations to address the issues facing young men of color:

1. Making the education of young men of color a national priority.

2. Increasing partnerships with existing organizations that are already addressing this issue.

3. Supporting educational reform that focuses on young men of color and all students in need.

4. Improving teacher education. Teachers need to be trained to address the needs of young men of color.

5. Developing culturally relevant programs that encourage academic achievement.

6. Supporting more research on this issue.

Sanez & Ponjuan (2008) also document the struggles of Latino males within higher education. Their work is a comprehensive literature review, including existing data from the census and NCES data. Not only do they reinforce that Latino males have the lowest college enrollment and graduation rate of any ethnic group, they also highlight the fact that little is known about this population. They go as far as to say the literature is “almost silent” on Latino males and their pathways into higher education and call for more future research. Sanez & Ponjuan (2008) also illustrate that Latino males are over represented within the military and in low level workforce positions. Many are unemployed or incarcerated.
Though there is a growing body of literature covering the experience of young men of color, most focuses on African-American males. Though both African-American and Latino populations are severely under-represented in higher education and may share similar struggles, there are also struggles, barriers and resources that may be specific to both populations. The majority of the literature covers macro factors and fails to focus on the micro, everyday issues, which may be more of a perceived barrier for these young men.

**Bourdieu’s concept of Field and this dissertation**

As we have seen, the concept of Field is important in considering both barriers and possible resources for Latino male students making the transition from high school to college. My study contributes the theoretical perspective of Bourdieu’s field to the literature on the high school to college transition of Latino males.

In the next chapter we explore the methodological approach I have used for this dissertation.
Chapter Three
Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand the barriers and resources Latino high school males encounter and negotiate as they transition from high school to college. Both the study and research question have been informed by the literature on Latinos and higher education and the theoretical framework of practice developed by Bourdieu (1990, 1992). As mentioned in the previous chapter, research pertaining to Latinos and higher education has virtually excluded males and they are currently absent from the discussion. Coupled with this gender disparity, the discourse surrounding Latinos and higher education has been deficit-oriented, concentrating on the monolithic construction of a “Latino experience” based on a Mexican/Mexican-American ethnic identity and Southwest geographical location within the United States. This study will broaden what it means to be a Latino trying to gain access to college.

Research Design

Ten young males from the Bronx, who self-identify as Puerto Rican, Dominican and Honduran, were recruited for this study. The students were enrolled in a college awareness program and were seniors when the study began. Data was gathered from the second semester of their senior year as they prepared their college applications until after they had been accepted to college and had made their college-going-decision. That is, the study took place between January and June of the same year. Their demographic characteristics and profiles appear in chapter Four.

A qualitative research design based upon one-to-one interviews and thematic
analysis provides the methodological tools to analyze their experience. A qualitative design was chosen because it provided the platform for the students to share their lived experience of the college transition process and allowed them to identify their perception of barriers and resources during this process and the ways in which they negotiated them.

Creswell (2007) suggest all qualitative research begins with an assumption, worldview, and theoretical lens, which are used to define how individuals or groups make meaning of a phenomenon. Creswell (2007) outlines the process of transforming an assumption into a viable qualitative study. This process includes the collection of data in:

- a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and the complex description and interpretation of the problem, and extends the literature or signals a call for action. (Creswell 2007, p.37)

In the next sections I will detail how this dissertation study follows a qualitative design according to Creswell’s construct.

Sample

The sample for any qualitative study is one of the most crucial components. Without a viable sample that best represents the phenomenon under study providing insight or data, there would not be anything to analyze or report. Students for this study were recruited through their participation in either the City University of New York’s (CUNY) At Home in College Access and Success Program (CASP) or the CUNY College Now Program located at Hostos Community College in the Bronx. The At Home in College CASP program is funded by the Robin Hood foundation. It is a college transition program that works with over 800 high school seniors from 30 New York City public high schools and over 100 students from CUNY GED programs. The purpose of the
program is to increase the college enrollment and retention rates of participating students’, and ultimately, their college graduation rates. College Now is a free program designed to prepare New York City's public high school students’ for college. Students’ earn college credits while taking college courses at participating CUNY campuses.

These two programs, CASP and College Now, were identified for the recruitment of students because they are both college bound and college awareness programs that serve two distinctly different student populations. The CASP program participants are students who need more academic assistance to access college, have lower college aspirations, and are typically enrolling in less selective institutions, mostly community colleges. College Now tends to recruit and attract students who have a higher GPA, higher college aspirations, and who eventually attend more selective college and universities, typically four-year institutions after their high school graduation. These two programs closely represent the student population of the Bronx by providing a sample, which represents both the higher achieving, and lower achieving students. Students were recruited through these programs, but this dissertation is not an assessment of these programs. Both sites were also selected because I have worked with these programs in the past and have a working familiarity of the programs, their missions, staff members, instructors and the type of students who choose to enroll in each. Because of my previous work with each program, there was already a built-in access. The site selection and students provided a purposeful and criterion sample (Creswell, 2007; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Creswell (2007) describes a purposeful sample as a process in which the researcher “selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposely inform an
understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p.125). As mentioned previously, these programs and the students represent a sample of both higher achieving and lower achieving students with aspirations to go to college and consist of “typical” students who attend school in the Bronx. This sample also falls into the category of what Miles and Huberman (1994) label a criterion sample given that there is an identified criteria for students to participate in this study. Students in this study attended one of the mentioned programs, aspired to go to college, identified as a Latino male, and attended school and lived in the Bronx.

While recruiting students, announcements were made during program hours to all students outlining the study and the criteria for participation. Students who showed an interest were provided a consent form and for students under the age of 18 a parent assent form, which outline the basis of the study. At that time, students were also informed that they needed to hand in the required forms as soon as possible and that participation in the study would be on a first come basis. For participation in the study, students were compensated in the form of a $10 gift card to the store of their choice for every session they attended.

Ten students in total were selected for this study with special attention paid to the origin of program from which they were recruited, location of the high school they attended, and self-identified ethnicity. An even split of both College Now students and CASP students was desired. Six students were eventually recruited from College Now, three from CASP, and one from both programs. Also a good representation of various high schools throughout the borough of the Bronx was accomplished in this small sample. Since the literature on Latinos and higher education is saturated with the
experiences of Mexican and Mexican-American students, it was important to find students who self-identified outside of this ethnic group and who represented the majority ethnic population of the Bronx, which is Puerto Rican and Dominican. An equal representation of both Puerto Rican and Dominican students was desired and almost achieved with one student who self-identified as Honduran. By emphasizing multiple sites and multiple ethnicities, this study ensured the data yielded multiple perspectives on the transition process most closely related to the lived experience of Latino males from the Bronx.

**Role of the researcher**

This dissertation project socially constructs the realities of Latino males and their transition to higher education through the use of interviews as the main method of collecting data. Interviews provided participants the platform to make meaning of their realities and recount their experience. Seidman (2006) suggest a three-interview series in conducting phenomenological interview research.

The first stage in Seidman’s (2006) construct is focused on life history, and obtaining demographic information. The interviewer is charged with trying to extract as much information from the participants about the subject under study of which the participant can recall at that time. Also during the first stage a rapport is built between the researcher and participants, allowing for the participants to be more comfortable during the next two stages.

The second stage of Seidman’s (2006) interview process pertains to the details of the experience. As Seidman suggests, the purpose of the second interview is to go further into detail and concentrate on the specific aspects of the participants’ present lived
experience of the phenomenon. The researcher’s role is to ask for details, not opinions of the subject under study as their opinions will be worked into the process later on. The third and final stage of this interview construct is the reflection and meaning stage where “we ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience” (Seidman 2006, p.18). This stage allows for participants to make an intellectual and emotional connection to the subject under study and leaves room for expressing their opinion. Though Seidman’s (2006) construct calls for a three-stage interview process, this dissertation project utilized a two-stage interview process and combined aspects of the first two stages accounting for the built-in access I had to the sites and the rapport I already had with many of the participants.

Interviews for this study covered the *college application and college choice period for students*, which occurred during the second semester of their senior year in high school. Two series of interviews were conducted to get a sense of what the application process was like for the students, and the factors that contributed to their eventual decision to attend an institution. The first interview covered demographic information and the college application process. Discussions around the factors which were most influential in applying to various schools were highlighted. This first interview was concerned with obtaining a detailed insight into the factors which contribute to the application process. The second sequence of interviews covered the college decision-making process. This stage focused on the time when participants made the choice of the college they would attend based upon their acceptances. Again, this stage was concerned with what influenced the students’ decision to attend and enroll in a college. Interviews were staggered in sequence to allow adequate time for students to receive admissions
letters and to make a decision as to what respective institution they would be enrolling in
the upcoming Fall semester.

Open-ended questions were best suited for this study because it allowed me as the
researcher to build upon, and explore, the answers given to questions asked and allowed
for both researcher and participant to construct a meaning of the situation based upon
their interaction with the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007; Seidman 2006).
Though closed-ended questions were utilized to gain initial demographic information, the
majority of questions utilized were open-ended which allowed for an organic
conversations and inquiry to take place. The interview protocol was refined with the help
of my committee and was provided to the students during the interviews.

Interviews took place at neutral sites that were easily accessible for participants
and myself. Interviews were conducted after school or during the weekend, allowing
students’ adequate time to attend the appointments. Interviews varied in length of time,
and were anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour. All interviews were audio recorded
and later transcribed.

**Thematic Analysis**

A thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Boyatzis (1998), was utilized to
analyze the data. Boyatzis (1998) introduces thematic analysis as a process to help
scholars from all disciplines analyze and sort through data in an attempt to construct
meaning. Thematic analysis is a process for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns
or themes within data. It helps to organize and “make sense” of a researcher’s data set
and helps to organize the data set into themes which describe a phenomenon. However, it
often goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis,
A thematic analysis was chosen because of its versatility and flexibility as a form of analysis, regardless of the researcher’s ontology or epistemology. As Braun and Clarke (2006) state:

thematic analysis is not wed to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and so it can be used within different theoretical frameworks (although not all), and can be used to do different things within them. Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or release method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effect of a range of discourses operating within society (p.6)

Thematic analysis is a systematic process, which provides a rich and detailed account of a phenomenon. This dissertation project utilized thematic analysis to socially construct the meaning of the college transition for the young men in the study, which helped to uncover various themes pertaining to barriers and barriers during their transition. As many scholars (Boyatzis, 1998; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006; Rice & Ezzy, 1999) have noted, the construction of themes is the central part of thematic analysis and are constructed through careful sifting of data.

Boyatzis (1998) outlines the four stages in developing the ability to use a thematic analysis. In the first stage, “sensing themes”, the researcher recognizes codeable moments. The researcher must be open to receive all information and their “senses” must be keen and ready to receive information. This happens when the researcher has grounding in the information or phenomenon being studied. In the second stage, the researcher must be prepared to “doing it reliably” (Boyatzis, 1998 p.11). Researchers need to train themselves to sense a codable moment and reliably use codes consistently.
Boyatzis suggest that if you walk away from an event or data today you should be able to
view it the same or similarly in the future. The third stage is developing a code to
“process and analyze or capture the essence of their observation” (p.11). This process
takes place over time with the researcher immersing themselves in the data and grappling
with its richness and the various perceptions of the information.

Codes identify a feature or function of the raw data, which appears interesting to
the researcher and provides the initial basis of assessment in a meaningful way regarding
the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke 2006). Codes are developed to begin
to sort through the data and are eventually combined to form themes regarding the
phenomenon. Once codes are established for the data, the merging of the codes takes
place in an attempt to construct themes.

Boyatzis (1998) describes themes as “a pattern found in the information that at
minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at a maximum interprets
aspects of the phenomenon” (p.4). Once themes are established, the final stage in
Boyatzis’ approach is to interpret the information and construct a theoretical or
conceptual framework. This merging and construction of themes contributes to the
development of knowledge and provides significance to the study.

*Reviewing Themes*

Themes were reviewed to assure they were prevalent to the research and to
determine if a deeper analysis was needed. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the
reviewing of themes should take place in two phases. Phase one or Level I, as Braun and
Clarke (2006) refer to it, consists of the researcher reviewing the themes of the data at
level of “coded data extracts. This means you need to read all the collated extracts for
each theme, and consider whether they appear to form a coherent pattern” (p.20). This phase requires the researcher to revisit the data and initial themes that emerge, and to make sure these themes form a coherent pattern or “story”. Do the themes which were initially identified form a coherent pattern which makes sense and begin to construct a reality of what the participants were trying to convey? If so, then you move on to the next stage/level.

Level II is a similar process, but examines the entire data set and calls for a refinement of themes. At this level, the researcher considers the validity of the individual themes and begins to construct a thematic map, which reflects the meanings of the data set as a whole. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) “what counts as accurate representation depends on your theoretical and analytic approach” (p.21). The thematic map is an organization of themes, which constructs the “story” being told. The thematic map should be an interpretation of the data that consistently aligns itself with the theoretical framework and research question. Themes should go through the process of refinement and should be defined based upon the “essence of what each theme is about” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 22).

**Limitations**

Though this study contributes to the current literature, there were still limits to what this project was able to accomplish. Like any research project, this project was narrow in scope and everything could not be accounted for within the study. Given that this study is a qualitative study whose focus is on ten students from the Bronx, it cannot, nor is it intended to be, generalizable for all Latino males. This study’s intent is not to claim that the experience of these young men are what all Latino male’s experience
throughout the country as they make a transition from high school to college. What the study accomplishes is to expand the narrative, push back against the current monolithic deficit discourse concerning this population, and provide a counter narrative to what has currently been reported and discussed.

A future study which encompasses the experience of more Latino males, from various geographical locations throughout the United States, and one that includes multiple ethnicities needs to be conducted to see what the experience of Latinos males is in regards to this transition. This serves as one entry point to this eventual outcome.

Another limitation of this study is that it is gender specific. This was done on purpose, given the limited data on this population. Other studies have focused on Latinas, but few on Latino males and this was the whole basis for the undertaking of this project. A future study with a similar ethnic and geographical sample focusing on females may garner the attention and consideration from future researchers and scholars to see if there are similarities or differences between the two groups and why.

_Reflectivity_

As a Latino, specifically a Puerto Rican, who grew up, was educated, works and lives in the Bronx, I have cultural insight and can relate to the experience pertaining to the college transition. These roles have provided me with valuable insight, which I have used to mentor students through their educational pathways. This insight along my “success” working with students has contributed to an emerging reputation as an individual who is an “expert” in the field. Though my lived experience and skills as a cultural insider has provided me with insight concerning this phenomenon, I am also reminded on a daily basis that I also inhabit the role of a cultural outsider.
As a researcher, emerging scholar and adjunct professor, students constantly remind me of the distance I have to their lives because of my age and roles I currently inhabit. These roles have enabled me to examine this phenomenon from a critical perspective and have provided me with the tools to deconstruct this phenomenon as an outsider who has insider information. The juggling of the insider/outsider duality is something I had to constantly manage as I collected and analyzed the data. To address any bias I used member checks and constantly discussed themes with colleagues to ensure validity.

**Validity**

To ensure validity of the data and an authentic representation of the participants during their transition, member checks were utilized. Member checks allows for the researcher to solicit participants feedback concerning the credibility and interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2007). Member checks were only conducted with half of the sample since some participants became unavailable after the data collection process. During member checks, I discussed emerging themes with participants, and they provided feedback concerning those themes. This was useful because it allowed for authenticity in the analysis and enabled participants to have ownership over their representation in the study.

**Ethical Issues**

All students were provided a parental consent form if under the age of 18, and a participant assent form otherwise outlining the scope and purpose of this project. All students were informed several times throughout the process that they had the option of not continuing and could withdraw from the study at anytime with no consequence.
Pseudonyms were provided for all students regardless of age and the location and names of the high schools the students attended were given pseudonyms as well. The names of the colleges in which the students enrolled were kept, in order to illustrate and highlight the type of institutions the participants attended in terms of geographical locations, prestige, and level (2 yr or 4yr, private or public). Also during the time of data collection participants were not enrolled in any of my classes, nor was I in direct contact with them in any other job roles. They were also instructed on numerous occasions that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

**Significance of the study**

This study contributes to the emerging literature on Latinos and higher education. This study expands the literature in three ways. First, it validates a different Latino experience, one of Latinos from the East coast and from ethnicities that are currently excluded or marginalized from the current discourse. Second, it takes the perspective of young men and how they navigate their transition. Current research concentrating on young men is limited, and this research is intended to help fill the void. Third, most research concerning this population focuses on the deficits of what it means to be Latino and the lack of Latino students within higher education. Though this study does address some of these issues, the intent of this study is to highlight how students made a successful transition to higher education.

Though some students in the study had some “hiccups” along the way, the majority of students had a successful transition in that they applied, were accepted, and enrolled in an institution of higher education. Given that the current research on Latinos and higher education mostly uses quantitative methods, this qualitative study is a break
from the norm and gives a more in-depth insight on the transition from the students’ perspective. This approach to the study allowed for students to identify the barriers and resources they experienced along their journey.
Chapter 4

The students

This chapter describes who the students are based on the demographic information they provided. Though all the students volunteered for this study on their own, I knew many of them prior to the study because of my involvement with the Hostos College Now Program and At Home in College College Access and Success Program (CASP). Though I knew many of the students, I did not have as intimate knowledge of who they were until the study. In my capacity in both of those contexts, there were a few situations where I had a chance to become more acquainted with the students and get to know them on a more personal basis. This project allowed me to get to know not only the students I already knew, but also new students on a more personal and intimate basis.

Students were recruited from five different schools located throughout the Bronx. These schools have been given pseudonyms to protect the identity of the students and schools. The schools the students were recruited from were: Alas Academy, Poet High School, Health Academy, Daily Academy, and Singer High School. These schools are located in different geographical locations throughout the Bronx and represent a good sample of the student population in the Bronx.

During my tenure in both programs, I have had contact with several employees at many of the schools and have had casual conversations with them about the school environments. They provided me with insight about the schools and the schools’ cultures.

As mentioned before, the students were also provided pseudonyms to protect their identity in this project. Many of the students chose the pseudonyms themselves, and for
those who did not, pseudonyms were provided. The students for this study self-identified as either Hispanic, Latino or Spanish, with the overwhelming majority of them identifying as either Puerto Rican or Dominican. Out of the ten students, four identified as Dominican, one as Puerto Rican, two as both Dominican and Puerto Rican, one as Puerto Rican and Ecuadorian, one as Dominican and Turkish, and the last as Honduran.

Table 1. Students in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>HS</th>
<th>College Acceptance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marvin</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>CASP</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Singer HS</td>
<td>2 year public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>CASP</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>DR/Turkish</td>
<td>Singer HS</td>
<td>Repeating 12th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernando</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>CASP</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>PR/ECU</td>
<td>Singer HS</td>
<td>4 year private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>CN</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Health Academy</td>
<td>4 year public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>CN</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>DR/PR</td>
<td>Health Academy</td>
<td>4 year public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>CN</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Health Academy</td>
<td>4 year public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>CN</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Poet HS</td>
<td>4 year public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>CN</td>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Poet HS</td>
<td>4 year public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>CN/CASP</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>PR/DR</td>
<td>Alas Academy</td>
<td>4 year public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manolo</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>CN</td>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Daily Academy</td>
<td>4 year private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who reported multiple ethnicities, usually favored one of the ethnicities over the other or just identified as Latino/Hispanic. Out of the ten students, eight of them are U.S. born and two were born in their home countries — the Dominican Republic and Honduras. The ethnic and U.S/foreign born breakdown for this study attempts to capture a good representation of the students in the Bronx.

Throughout this dissertation I will use the term Latino and Hispanic interchangeably to refer to the same thing.
Five schools throughout the Bronx are represented in this dissertation project. The schools were small schools and were located on larger campuses. Each school had different themes which made them unique to the study.

*Singer Academy* is known in the Bronx for its performing arts program. Students who attended this school were able to study music as well as academics. The majority of the students who attended this school were musical performers. I frequently visited Singer High School during my dissertation, and was asked on several occasions to speak to the senior class about college.

*Health Academy* is an early college program where students earn college credits while in high school. Health academy is one of the few early college programs located in NYC. Out of all the schools, I had the most familiarity with this school. I frequently worked with students from the school who were not part of the dissertation sample, and was very familiar with the school personnel.

*Poet High* is a small school located on a very large campus consisting of ten other schools. Students learn in small group settings, were encouraged to be world thinkers, and studied visual arts. I had some familiarity of this school, as I had worked with them, but I was not as familiar with the school as I was with the previous two.

*Alas Academy* is an all-boys school public school located in the Bronx. College and becoming a productive world citizen are emphasized at this school. Though I did not frequent Alas Academies campus, I did work very closely with school personnel on various projects.

Finally, *Daily Academy* is a small school whose doors closed soon after the study concluded. I never had any interaction with Daily Academy, but was aware of their
reputation thanks to some of the work I conducted in the Bronx. The school personnel had a reputation of being disorganized and the school had a bad reputation. It was eventually closed for poor academic performance.

In the following sections I will provide background information on each individual student to provide a deeper understanding of who my participants are and the degree of my involvement with them prior to the study. I will introduce the students in the order in which they appear in Table 1 above, and grouping them according to the school that they attended. I start with students at Singer, the high school focused on performing arts.

**Marvin, the jokester**

Marvin was a student who was recruited from the CASP program. Marvin was known as a jokester by many of his peers and by the personnel where he attended school. I did not know Marvin personally prior to this study and the only interaction I had with him was when I talked to his class during a site visit, and when he went on various college tours that I supervised. Whenever I asked the school personnel about Marvin, many of his teachers and counselors would describe Marvin as “out to lunch”, a “space cadet” and “a lost cause”. Once I began speaking to Marvin, I started to become offended by those terms used to describe him. Though I was well aware of Marvin’s aloofness, once you began to look past it you began to realize that Marvin was a very insightful student who provided deep knowledgeable answers. I just had to decode his answers since they were usually provided in a joking manner.

Marvin is 18 years old and went to Singer High School. He grew up and lived in the Bronx and self-identified as Hispanic American but more specifically Dominican. His
mom and dad were born in the Dominican Republic and he was born in the United States. His household consisted of his mom and two sisters. He was the older brother. One of his sisters was approximately three years younger, and the other was approximately nine years younger in age. When asked about his discussions with his family about college, he stated he talked to his mom when he was eight or nine years of age, but he couldn’t recall much of the conversation.

Marvin applied to all CUNY schools, but mostly applied to community colleges. He informed me he had intentions of transferring to a four-year school after his time at community college. His mom, to the best of his knowledge, went to college in the Dominican Republic but he didn’t know much about his father’s education. He stated he really never talked to his father about whether or not he went to college. When asked about the rest of his family, outside the nuclear unit, he informed me that his aunt went to college because she is a teacher in the Dominican Republic. From what he knew, in order to be a teacher in the Dominican Republic you need to have a college education, so he assumed his aunt had a college education. He believed that some other family members, or extended family members, may have gone to college, but he’s not too sure. He recalled talking to family members about college and specifically recalled speaking to two of his uncles about college. He stated they encouraged him to go to college and to pursue a good career, which they equated to obtaining a college education.

**Nelson, the Talented Singer**

Nelson was a student I met through his participation in the At-Home in College, College Access and Success program. I really didn't know Nelson prior to the study, but after I made the announcements for possible recruitment for the study, Nelson
immediately approached me about participating. Throughout the time I knew Nelson, he was always preoccupied with a possible career in music. In fact, the first time I became aware of Nelson as a participant in the program was when his school came to visit Hostos, as part of a college tour. After the students completed a workshop, they all insisted that Nelson serenade the group. Nelson got up and sang in front of the whole group, of about 45 students. He informed the group that it was an original song which he wrote and produced himself.

Throughout our discussions, Nelson constantly stressed the fact that he wanted to go to a college that emphasized music. Music was such a passion for Nelson, that he became preoccupied with it and struggled with school and had to repeat his senior year. Nelson was the only student in the group that did not graduate high school during the time span of this project. I thought that it would be best to keep Nelson in the study since he could express a different point of view from those who were graduating. Nelson constantly discussed the struggles that he faced as he was pulled in two different directions — his love for music and the social pressure to complete high school.

At the time I began interviewing Nelson, he was 17 years old. Nelson grew up in the Bronx and lived with his mother, father and younger brother. Nelson identified as Hispanic, specifically Dominican, though his father was Turkish. Nelson associated more with the Dominican heritage in his family than the Turkish. In fact he stated he had little knowledge of what his Turkish heritage entailed and was only acquainted with it through a middle school project. Nelson tried to stay neutral when it came to other matters with his parents, including practicing religion. He chose not to participate in either his mother’s Catholic religion, as well as his dad’s Muslim one. He stated he does so to avoid
“religion fights” in the family. Nelson spoke Spanish and hung out with other Latinos, so he felt as if he had the best of both worlds.

As mentioned before, music was a big part of Nelson’s life and future goals. Because of this, Nelson constantly struggled with whether or not he wanted to attend college. When I asked him about his feelings toward college, he indicated to me that “Sometimes because I’m affiliated with music and stuff like that, sometimes it’s like, ‘Do I really need college?’ Other times I felt like I could get a lot from college and stuff. It’s like 50-50 of good and bad.” During the start of this project Nelson was very much undecided about college, whether it fit into his future plans and if he could really benefit from attending college. Since his goal was to be a musician, at times he was banking on his talents, rather than on education. Nelson states, “I think about both of them a lot, but I think if I had to choose, I think more, because music I think I could go somewhere if I play some music and stuff like that. If I go toward music I will get somewhere, whereas college, I’m not.” Nelson constantly struggled with college and whether it was a fit for him.

Nelson at the beginning of the study was at a major fork in his educational journey. Because Nelson had to repeat some classes to earn credits to graduate, he was witnessing the classmates applying to college, while he was dealing with the fact that he might have to be at his high school for another year. He was juggling and contemplating what he wanted to do in his near future. The one thing Nelson was sure about was music and its place in his future plans.

Nelson was not getting much help from anyone in his family with his college

---

5 Throughout our times together, I witnessed these decisions and reality weigh Nelson down and what he wanted to do became cloudier and cloudier.
decisions. No one in his immediate family attended college, but he did mention that he
had a half sister who did attend college. He said, “Well, I have a sister, but she doesn’t
live with me and she’s the only one – yes, a half sister, and she’s the only one that I know
of that actually went to college. My mom and dad never talked to me about it. I never
asked. It was never brought up.” He indicated later that his half-sister had to move out of
the house because of a situation, so he did not have much interaction with her. She was
about 9 years older than him, and although he didn’t have much access to her because of
her falling-out with her parents, he knew she attended Lehman College and was an
Economics major. She had superficial conversations with him about college and that it
was tough, and that he had to go, but never had detailed conversation with her about her
experience and what to expect.

Though his mom and dad did not attend college, his mom showed some interest in
his future educational plans and had discussions with him about it. Nelson discussed how
his mom became increasingly interested in his educational progress after he was informed
that he would have to remain in high school for an extra year. Nelson recalls a
conversation he had with his mother about the moment when she found out in April he
was going to have to repeat the 12th grade. He states: “That’s when I started like, ‘Oh I
got to get serious because if I want to go to college, I’m going to have to catch up on
credits and get good grades.’” He remarked his mother telling him, ‘Get a good average,
get good grades you get better opportunities, you get to go to better colleges.’” Though
his mother encouraged him to take school more seriously, she never had distinct
conversations about college per se. She had conversations about him needing to go to
college, to influence his future, but she never had in depth conversations about college.
Though Nelson’s dad did live with the family, he did not have much influence in his life besides providing financial support to the family. His father was physically present, but did not have an emotional connection with him.

Nelson was one of the most talkative participants in the study. During the interviews, he gave the most insight into his decision-making process, what he was struggling with, and was very open about his past and future. Nelson required the least prompting during our conversations and was the most candid. Though Nelson wasn’t transitioning into college the following semester, he did provide great insight into what students in his circumstance might be going through.

**Fernando, the Quiet Musical “Genius”**

Out of all the students in the study I had the least interaction with Fernando prior to the study. He was recruited from the CASP program and approached me about being part of the study with Nelson. Like Marvin and Nelson, Fernando was a student at Singer High School. He was very quiet, and during the CASP session he did not stand out as much as Nelson. Though he was not as visible as Nelson, those students to whom I talked to always mentioned Fernando’s musical genius. He played many instruments. His guidance counselor also told me Fernando was “nice”, and had played at several major events throughout the city. When I began having conversations with Fernando, he was 18 years old and was attending a public music school in the Bronx. He lived in the Bronx with his mother, father, brother and two sisters, and identified as Puerto Rican and Ecuadorian. Though Fernando was not very clear as to why he wanted to attend college, he stated that college would be a good place to get the direction he needed. Like many of the other students, he felt that college would be helpful for the future.
Fernando had mixed feelings about his eventual transition. He was nervous about the uncertainty of college and what to expect, but was eager to go at the same time. Fernando applied to five colleges in total — four CUNY’s and one private school. He applied to Queensborough College, LaGuardia Community College, Lehman College, Queens College and Nyack College. He applied to all these schools because of the programs they offered, specifically music and performing arts. He wanted to study music and to continue to work in the performing arts.

Out of all his nuclear family members, only Fernando’s father and sister attended college. His father attended Queens College for a very short time but did not persist because his mother was pregnant with Fernando’s older sister. His older sister went to Nyack College and graduated with a degree in psychology. During her time at Nyack, Fernando did not have any conversations with her about her college experience but he said he had an idea of what was going on. She went to school fulltime and worked fulltime since she did not get a full financial aid package. She commuted everyday from their house in the Bronx to Nyack New York to attend classes. He realized that college was going to be a big challenge based upon what he witnessed his sister go through. She did talk to Fernando about how expensive the books were and how some teachers were friendly in college.

Fernando had other conversations with people about college, namely with some of the personnel at his high school. His family members did have brief conversations with him about applying and taking the SAT’s so he could go to a good college. His father and mother wanted him to apply to Queens College, but their conversations did not go past that. He recalled teachers and staff members at his high school talking about college and
the importance of going. They gave him advice like, “You can’t be absent from class,” and told him about the importance of applying for financial aid. He did credit his college advisor with making him more aware about the college application process and for helping him to identify and apply to particular schools.

**Antonio, the Student with Potential**

Antonio was a student in the Hostos College Now Program. Antonio was recruited from Health Academy, a high school with which I had a really close relation, as I did a lot of programming within his high school. I did not really knowing Antonio personally. He was a student that I weekly said hello to, as I passed him in the halls. Antonio was perceived by many in the school, students and staff alike, as a student who had a lot of potential but who didn't apply himself to his education. During my visits to Antonio's high school, I often saw him hanging out in the hallways with his friends as opposed to being in class. Though Antonio hung out a lot and had a reputation for not applying himself, he was on track to graduate from high school and wanted to participate in this study. Though I was skeptical about allowing Antonio to participate in the study, because I was afraid he would not complete the study, I allowed him to do so because I felt he had a different story. Antonio had the potential to do well in college, but there were still many factors that held him back. I thought his story could provide some insight into how a “middle” achieving student made the college transition.

When Antonio began the study, he was seventeen years of age. He lived and grew up in the South Bronx from the time he was four years old. When I asked him what he identified as, he indicated “Spanish.” He was the only student in the study who identified himself as such, but this is not uncommon in the Bronx. Many students who are of
Hispanic/Latino decent self-identify as “Spanish” or are identified as such. When I probed him a bit further about his ethnicity, he self-identified as Puerto Rican.

Including himself, there are four people living in his house — his mother, father, brother and grandmother. When I inquired about why he wanted to go to college, Antonio stated:

When I was younger I didn’t really know the answer to that, but as I got old I figured out a lot of people that go to college are more successful than people that don’t go to college. It also depends on your dedication to it as well, so you can just go to college and not do anything. But I think with the dedication I have now, that I’m older, I think I can do a lot better than I’ve done with my previous years at school (April, 2010)

Like many of the other students in the study, Antonio equated a college education with success in life.

Antonio applied to all CUNY schools and was adamant about staying in New York City. He applied to Bronx Community College, The Borough of Manhattan Community College, New York City College of Technology, LaGuardia Community College, and Hunter College. His rationale for applying to just CUNY schools, and specifically four community colleges, was that he felt as if his high school grade point average was not good enough to get into any SUNY schools as well as Private Colleges. He stated:

Well, throughout high school my grades weren’t great. I wouldn’t say they were great, let’s just leave it at that. I realized that there are a lot of community college that are outside the city and a lot of people told me, ‘You should leave the city,’ just things like that, and I’m like, ‘I don’t really see the point of leaving the city when my grades aren’t great’ (April, 2010).

Antonio also wanted to stay close to his social network in the city.

He stated that no one in his nuclear family had attended college, but that he did know of an aunt who was “attending some community college, trying to get a degree in
something.” When I probed more, he did begin to recall other member of his distant family who attended college, an uncle who attended City College, and cousins who attended City College as well. His cousins shared their experiences with him about City College, but mostly about the prestige of City College and how he should think about attending. He stated, “They were just talking about City College and how City College is pretty good. At one point it used to be one of the best colleges in the United States. Just a lot of good things about City College like it’s not bad; it will really be good to go there.” Though Antonio did not want to attend City College and wasn’t influenced by these discussions, his family still tried to persuade him to attend. Besides talking about the prestige of City College and trying to influence him to attend, his family members did not talk about their experience at the school, nor did they talk about what to expect. Like many of the other participants, his family members did have discussions with him about the importance of college and urged him to attend, but they didn’t get into details in terms of what to expect.

Antonio did not have any assistance from any of his family members in his college application process. He states he did everything by himself and chose all the colleges he wanted to attend himself. He does, however, state that his mother helped him with the financial aid application, but only the portion where she had to enter her financial information.

As for his friends, he did state that he did have some friends in school but they didn’t play a role in the application process. When questioned about whether his friends had an influence on the process, he stated:

Not really, I thought about myself. I thought what would be best for me like staying at home, whether the college is big or not, how far it will be, things like
that. Of course it would be nice to go with one of my friends, but I didn’t take that into play as much (April, 2010).

Antonio wanted to pick the schools which had the best fit for him, and made sure he was not going to apply to a school just because his friends were attending or planning on attending.

As we move forward, we will see how Antonio is a complex participant within the study. He is a very vocal young man, especially when he is around his peers. But when Antonio is being interviewed, he becomes very quiet and answers the questions with very “straight to the point” type of responses. One of the other participants, Pablo, also informed me that though Antonio self-identified as Hispanic for the study, when asked the same question around his peers he said he identified as Black. Though this never came out in the interviews, this was something I wondered about after the interviews were complete.

**Diego, the Secret Agent**

Diego, like Antonio, was a student whom I knew of, but didn’t know on a personal basis. I basically knew of him because of my interactions with Pablo whom we will meet next. He and Pablo were friends, and many times when I would have casual conversations with Pablo, Diego was around. Diego was recruited through the College Now Programs as like Antonio above he attended the Health Academy High School in the Bronx. Pablo often referred to Diego as a secret agent, because he was always in and out of contact with people, as I quickly found out during this study. Pablo would say, “You would see Diego around one day and talk to him and then lose contact with him for several days soon after” (April, 2010). Though Diego had every electronic gadget known to man, all with Internet and e-mail capabilities, it was often hard to get in contact with
Diego. Like Nelson and Fernando, Diego was a very talented musician. All the students at his school raved about his musical talents and many often stated that they wished they were as good as he was. Diego played many musical instruments, including the piano and guitar, which he taught to himself. Though Diego had musical talents, he did not express any interest in studying them formally while in college. Instead, he wanted to go to school to become a mechanical engineer, which he felt was more of a passion.

Diego’s parents were of both Puerto Rican and Dominican descent, but he identified more with his Puerto Rican heritage. He lived at home with both parents and had a younger sister and brother. About three years separated him from his sister, who was the next oldest, and about eight years separated him from his younger brother. Like many of the other participants, Diego felt that by going to college he would be getting away from the Bronx and it would lead to an eventual career. When questioned about his feelings toward college, Diego expressed he felt intimidated. He said “College is such a big thing compared to high school, middle school. College is a big thing you have to make it or break it” (April, 2010) He felt as if the stakes were much higher in college and it was going to be a larger transition than he was used to. Part of the stress for him with the transition was the money. As he said, “College is the place where you have to really spend your money there and try hard ” (April, 2010) Like many of the participants in the study, money was a big factor in his decision about college and it was weighing on him.

For Diego, college was really important because it gave him a competitive edge in the workforce. I asked Diego if he felt college was important and he stated:

Yes, today you really need college because the workforce is competitive. I see with my parents how some of them went to two-year degree schools or APEX kind of school and are kind of struggling to really compete with guys who have four-year degrees and masters; and it’s a lot harder to get a job. (April, 2010)
Diego applied to a lot of different schools his senior year. He applied to CUNY schools, SUNY schools and some privates. The CUNY schools he applied to were: Lehman, City, and Brooklyn College. The SUNY schools he applied to were: Binghamton and Stony Brook. He also applied to Lehigh, Trinity, Syracuse, and Boston College. Diego applied to these colleges on his own with no help from his family and some help from his college guidance counselor. All of these schools had engineering programs, or offered engineering as a major.

Unfortunately Diego was rejected from all of the SUNY and private schools he applied to. He was holding out hope for Syracuse since he had not heard from them, when I interviewed him.\(^6\) I was shocked that this was the case, given that from what I knew of Diego, he was very studious according to teachers and peers. When Diego discussed being rejected from all of his schools, you could see the grief on his face. Though he stated he was OK, you could tell this had a negative impact on him. He was accepted to Lehman and Brooklyn College and had plans to attend Lehman in the Fall.

Like many students, Diego wanted to stay on the Eastern and Northeastern coast to attend school. He felt staying close to home would be more financially feasible and in the long run would cost him less money. Diego came from a family that had some background in higher education. His mother obtained an associates degree in Fashion, and his father went to a technical school. In his extended family, he had a cousin who attended college in Philadelphia, but was unsure what school he was attending and his major. He recalls having discussions with his family about college and is clear about the message they conveyed to him. He states “When they talk about college they stress the money because they’re in debt now and the main thing with the colleges was just

\[^6\] I later found out that Syracuse had rejected him.
financial thing; how much it cost, and then location ” (April, 2010) These discussions with his family had an affect on Diego that played out in the application process. Besides the stressing of finances and money in his college transition process, Diego didn’t recall any other conversations with his family about college. Though both his parents attended and graduated from a post-secondary institution they did not have discussions about their experience.

His family did caution him about the transition in terms of being aware of all the “dangers” of going away to school, like alcohol and drugs, but neither his father nor his mother could talk directly about what the transition would entail. He discussed this by stating:

No… I know my mother got out of high school and she go directly to college, after she was done and my father never went – didn’t finish high school. I guess I was the first person in the family to finish high school, go to four-year college and then just go. (April, 2010)

Because he is the first in his family to go to college as a “traditional” student, his parents and family were unable to provide any advice about the transition, but they were aware of some potential pitfalls and wanted to prepare Diego for his next step.

**Pablo and his Senioritis**

Pablo and I first became acquainted while he was a sophomore in Health Academy High School. I was the coordinator of a male mentoring program at the college where Health Academy was located. This mentoring program was part of the CUNY Black Male Initiative and paired junior high school, high school and college students in a safe space to discuss relevant issues to them. The program was unique to CUNY because this was the only one of its kind associated with the Black Male Initiative, and was able to bring three generations of students together because of the location of the schools.
Traditionally, the program drew college students, high school juniors and seniors and junior high school students. Pablo decided to join the program as a sophomore in High School. This was rare for the program, since a lot of the recruitment of the high school students was done through peer recommendations and snowball recruitment. Pablo decided to join the program on his own and was a shy and quiet student when he first joined the group. As the months went by, Pablo grew in confidence, started to participate more in the activities and took more of a leadership role. He became more acclimated with the other students in the program and began to “hang out” with them outside of program hours. This was rare in Health Academy since for the most part, classmates from the same year tended to stick together.

It was customary in the mentoring program for the senior high school class to transition out of the program, since the majority of them were going away to college, and for the junior class to take over the leadership role the following year. Since Pablo was a cycle behind this model, he moved up in responsibility and leadership obligations, but was still technically a junior. Pablo had grown close to the students of the graduating senior class, and in actuality many of the students within that class saw him as almost one of their own. By this time Pablo had become very involved in all the activities in the program and also in his high school.

With the end of the school year approaching, I had a discussion with Pablo about the following year and his expected involvement. Since he had been there for such a long time, I expected him to be someone I could lean on for leadership and to usher in the new class of students. He agreed to do so, and seemed excited that he was going to be the lead student mentor for the high school students. When we came back that following fall
semester, Pablo became very distant. He participated in some of the initial meeting and seemed interested in the program from the outset, but as the semester moved along, he became more distant and less interested in the program and his schooling. I would often see Pablo hanging outside of school with his fellow students and would ask him if he was coming to the program. He would respond with a yes, but when program time came around, he was nowhere in sight. His grades began to suffer, so much so that his guidance counselor would contact me about his progress. What was once a good student, who was very focused, became less engaged in school and began hanging with the “wrong” crowd.

Since Pablo and I had a long standing relationship I approached him several times. I was concerned that there might be a significant trauma occurring in his life, maybe something at home, which was driving his withdrawal from school. Every time we sat down to discuss his grades, he would always assure me that he was OK, nothing was going on, and that he would be fine. Later, while part of this research project, he would tell me that the cause of his withdrawal was a severe case of senioritis, which from my experience is very common with high school students. Senioritis is a common term used by high school seniors, as the explanation as to why they are less engaged and less motivated in their schoolwork. This usually takes place senior year and for the most part is something they look forward to. They all feel as if they have earned the right to be less motivated and engaged in school, because of the effort they have put in the prior years. A lot of students are aware of this emotional/psychological condition, and will use it as an explanation for their aloofness in school during their senior year. The odd thing about it is that from my experience all students, no matter what their educational output prior to senior year is, feel as if they have earned the right to “skate” through senior year. Though
senioritis is described by many students as a “bug” or “sickness” they have “caught,” and for the most part can be “diagnosed,” it is just a rite of passage in senior year. In fact many of the students within this study referred to senioritis and at one time or another they were struck with the contagious “bug”.

Kevin, the Valedictorian

I first became acquainted with Kevin the prior academic year when he enrolled in my College Now Sociology class. Kevin was a quiet student at Poet High School who really didn’t speak much in class. During the first few sessions of the course, Kevin would come late to class and would laugh and talk with other students whom he knew from his school. After one class I asked him and the three other students to stay behind to talk to them. I discussed with them that if they kept up their current behavior they would not pass the class. After that meeting, Kevin started to take the class more seriously and began to perform at a higher level. He separated himself from those students and received an A as a final grade. I was so impressed by Kevin’s turnaround and performance that I shared with him an internship opportunity in San Francisco California for an organization called Greenlining. I had made an agreement with the Executive Director to allow two students from the Bronx to attend the program with all expenses paid. The summer prior to data collection for this dissertation project, I recommended that Kevin apply to the program. Kevin was accepted and spent 10 days in California as part of the internship. When Kevin came back he was a changed young man, and seemed to be a bit more focused.

When I began recruitment for my dissertation project I bumped into Kevin at Hostos and explained the project, in which he agreed to participate. Kevin was a high-
performing student who graduated from his high school as the valedictorian. Kevin was an understated and quiet young man, but when he when he spoke, he had very insightful things to say. Prior to the collection of data for this dissertation project, I knew Kevin as one of my students, who went to California as part of an internship agreement I arranged, but did not know much about his background.

Kevin was 18 years old and attended Poet High School in the Bronx where he also lived. He identified as Latino but more specifically Dominican. He lived with his mother, brother and two sisters, and was the oldest sibling. Though he was the first to go to college in his nuclear family, he did have cousins who attended college, and some had graduated. He applied to various schools which included Lehman, Hunter, City and Baruch College. He said that he applied to mostly four-year schools but that his guidance counselor suggested that he apply to some two-year schools as well. He also applied to SUNY schools such as Albany, New Paltz, and Old Westbury. Finally he applied to five private schools which included Long Island University, Iona College, St. John’s University, Fordham, Hofstra and Saint Rose. He wanted to stay close to home, preferably in the state of New York. He had thought of applying to schools in California, but after the time he had spent out there during his internship, he changed his mind.

**David, the Family Trailblazer**

David, like Kevin, was a student at Poet High School. He was another student whom I knew prior to the study. David and I first became acquainted when he enrolled in my College Now Sociology class. Like Kevin, David was an interesting and sometimes perplexing student. David and I would frequently have conversations prior to and after class about Sociology and life in general. Though David showed an interest in Sociology,
he did not perform very well in class. I think one of the issues David had with the class was the fact that his English proficiency was not on par with the rest of the students and he had difficulty grasping some of the concepts. I first became aware of this when David and I got into a discussion about his attendance in class. He had missed several classes because of soccer matches, which he was passionate about, and I questioned whether he wanted to be in the class. He began to tell me that I should give him a break because he couldn’t speak English very well. Though the compassionate side of me wanted to provide David with a break, the rational side of me kicked in, as I didn’t want to provide a “crutch” for him. I wanted David to understand that he could not use this as an excuse as he continued his educational journey.

During that semester I would stay late or come in early just so I can speak to David and make sure he was grasping the content. Though I extended myself, there were often times when David did not show up to tutoring, and he began to withdraw more and more from the course. At the end of the semester David not pass the course.

When I approached David about the possibility of participating in the study, he was very excited and honored that I would ask them to partake in the study. Though I had some initial background information about David, I really didn’t know him personally until I began to conduct the study.

David was 18 years old. Like all the other students, David also lived in the Bronx. He identified as Latino but specifically as a black Latino from Honduras, where he had migrated from a few years prior. He lived with his mother, brother, and sister, and was the middle child, with his sister being four years older and his brother being four years younger. David applied to mostly CUNY schools — Hunter College, Brooklyn College,
City Tech, and Lehman College. He didn’t apply to any SUNY schools nor did he apply to any private schools. Initially David didn’t express why he only applied to CUNY schools, but in later conversations it was revealed that it was a financial decision based upon the fact that he would not get financial aid to attend school because of his citizenship status and would have to pay out-of-pocket. CUNY made sense to him because it was a good affordable education.

David told me he was going to be the first in his nuclear family to attend college. He informed me that though no one in his nuclear family attended college, he did have cousins and aunts who did. He recalled having conversations with his cousin about their college experience, and his cousin who attended John Jay College discussed the difficulties of college. He also had conversations with his aunts about college. His aunts told him college was not easy, but it was not that hard. Though his sister did not attend college, he did have conversations with her, and she gave him the advice to not waste the opportunity that he had to attend college. He said his mom really never talked to him about college because she never had the opportunity to attend herself. Though she did not specifically talk about college, she did believe an education was the key to a better life. David’s father had not been present in his life for the past six years and he never recalled his dad ever having conversations with him about college. His mom was a driving factor in him wanting to attend college, but he also felt as if he had to do this for the people that were dear to him, for his future and his future family.

Daniel, the Aspiring Teacher

Daniel was another student who participated in the Sociology class I taught at Hostos as part of the College Now program. During the first part of the semester in my
course Daniel was a student who was really engaged in the class, came on time, participated often, and handed in all his assignments. As the semester moved along, Daniel became less engaged in the class, and did not complete the course. Daniel was a student at Alas High School, the all-boys school.

When I first met Daniel he impressed me so much that I offered him the internship opportunity in California in which Pablo and Kevin had taken part. Danny was really honored to have this internship opportunity presented to him and said he would complete the application. Daniel never turned in the application. After the class had ended I never saw Daniel again until I bumped into him when he was participating in the CASP program. After the initial awkward hellos and surprise from Daniel, I approached his high school counselor to inquire more about him. Like some of the other participants, Daniel was described as a student with great potential who was underachieving. His counselor had made special arrangements for Daniel to visit his Alma Mater to talk to the admissions officer. His counselor had a special arrangement with the school where his students would get special considerations to attend the school. Though his counselor went to great lengths for Daniel, he was still not keeping up his end of the agreement. Daniel still had not turned in his application to the college and was really laboring getting through the application process for other schools. His counselor suggested that Daniel would be a good participant for the study, and after having a discussion with Daniel about the possibility of participating in the project he agreed and promised me this time I could rely on him. Though I had interactions with Daniel prior to the study, as with the other students, I did not have intimate knowledge of who he was as individual. His participation in the study began to open my eyes as to why Daniel struggled with the
Daniel came from a family who all went to college. Daniel’s mother and father both went to and graduated from the same college. Daniel’s brother went away to Monroe where he did not persist past his first year, and his sister went to New Hampshire College where she struggled as well. His sister eventually enrolled in Bronx Community College where she graduated with her Associates degree and is now attending Lehman College in pursuit of her bachelor’s degree. Witnessing his older brother and sister struggle with college made Daniel conscious of the schools to which he applied. He did not want to put his family through financial hardship, like his older siblings did, and therefore decided he only wanted to attend CUNY schools. His thinking was he could earn the same degree at a CUNY as he could in any other school in the country. He applied to six CUNY schools, but did eventually apply to a private school at the urging of his guidance counselor.

Daniel’s intention was to become a teacher after he graduates from college and his counselor insisted that he apply to Wheelock College because of their strong teacher education program. Though he applied, he did so half-heartededly and only did so to please his counselor, since he had no intention of attending.

His drive to apply and attend college was driven by two factors. The first was his connection that college would translate into a career. He stated that many people in his family, outside his nuclear family, did not attend college and he saw them struggle with minimum wage jobs. He did not want to become one of those people. Another driving force was his father, who had conversations with him when he was younger discussing his struggles to earn a degree.
Daniel’s father was originally from the Dominican Republic and came to the United States to attend school. He discussed with Daniel the difficulties he had struggling to get a degree and to earn a living. These influences are what drove Daniel to want to go to college, but he was weary about the transition. Throughout our conversations he emphasized he did not want to be a burden on his family, like his older siblings. Daniel also emphasized that he was ready to go to college but didn’t know if he could stay away from temptation. This was another reason why he wanted to stay close to home and be around a “support group” just in case he did end up slipping.

**Manolo, the Over Anxious Planner**

Like Marvin, Manolo was another student I did not know prior to the study. Manolo was recruited by the director of the College Now program. She had interactions with Manolo and felt he would be a good fit for the study. Manolo was one of the few students in the study who made all the interview sessions and kept frequent contact with me. During the interviews, Manolo was one of the students who provided the most in-depth answers to questions without much probing. He became comfortable talking to me about personal issues very quickly and was not guarded, unlike some of the other participants. Many of Manolo’s answers were very well thought out and I could tell he had thought long and hard about his college aspirations.

Manolo was 17 years of age when I conducted his first interview. He attended the Daily Academy, located in the Bronx, a school that was slated to close. He identified as Dominican, from the Dominican Republic. He arrived in the United States seven years earlier and lived in Philadelphia during his first year in the US. He came to New York City in 2003 to attend the sixth grade. During the seventh and eighth grade he transferred
and attended schools in both New York City (specifically the Bronx) and Philadelphia. He spent the majority of the eighth grade in the New York City public school system. At the time of his interview, he lived with his mother, two sisters, and his mother’s husband, his stepdad.

Unlike some of the other students in the study, Manolo applied to mostly private schools away from the Bronx. When asked which schools he applied to, he could only recall applying to Adelphi University, Hofstra University, and Boston University. He also applied to UC San Diego, which was uncommon for many of the students I worked with in the Bronx. He opted not to apply to SUNY schools nor did he apply to any CUNY schools because he felt like living in the city was not an option. His initial intention wasn’t to apply to mostly private schools, but after he finished compiling his list of target schools he reported, “it just worked out that way.”

Unlike the other participants in the study, Manolo began inquiring about various institutions of higher education at the end of junior year and mostly did so on his own. He recalled visiting various websites such as the College Board, to get a better sense of how to choose the right college. When he began looking at schools during his junior year, he initially approached his guidance counselor who informed him that she didn’t have time or wasn’t available to help him out. She instructed him to make an appointment in order to get help with searches, but she stated that the seniors were her priority and unfortunately he was not a top priority at the time. Growing increasingly frustrated about having to wait, Manolo conducted the whole college search process on his own.

When I questioned Manolo about his family’s education, he stated that he didn’t believe anybody on his mother’s side graduated college except for maybe her older sister
who is about 25 years of age. He believed she has a degree, but didn’t know exactly what discipline or field it was in. He said his mother didn’t have a college education but that she did try to go back to school recently. She enrolled at Hostos Community College, but she withdrew and didn’t return. He believed she was there for a semester or so, but didn’t complete her education. He wasn’t too sure about the specifics of her time at Hostos, but does recall her attending for a short time. As for the rest of his family, he stated his brother went to college and believed graduated with a degree “in computers or something.” He believes his brother did graduate college but is not too sure because he recalls that his brother still owed work and had to finish a creative writing class that he believes he didn’t pass. He says he thinks his brother should try to finish that one class and then should be done with his two-year degree.

Manolo stated that his sister is currently attending Bronx Community College and has intentions of eventually transferring to Hostos Community College. One of his other sisters was attending Lehman College, but had to stop attending because she became pregnant. When I asked him if he had any conversations with his family about college, he stated that he didn’t really have any conversations with his older siblings about college and that his sister was actually the first one to go to college. Instead of being on the receiving end of conversations regarding college, he indicated he was providing college guidance for his older sister “because she spent two years in limbo not knowing anything about college or a career.” Prior to attending Bronx community College, his older sister attended the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) and transferred. He felt as if he knew more about the college experience than his siblings because he took three College Now classes — two at Hostos, and one at Lehman College. The only
conversation he recalls having with his family members or extended family members about college was a conversation he had with his uncle in the Dominican Republic in which his uncle urged him to do better than his brothers and sisters because they were not really doing anything with the opportunities that they have had.

Conclusion

The profiles of the students discussed above show how they were embedded in various different fields or settings and how this impacted their college transition. For example students discussed family, school and the Bronx as fields they had to negotiate. In the next section, I will use field and setting interchangeably. I will discuss how the students viewed living in the Bronx, and how that impacted their habitus and college aspirations. This field/setting of the Bronx had an impact on how they each viewed the transition to college and their disposition toward college as a whole. Though settings, in particular the Bronx, did not play an ultimate role in the majority of students’ decision to attend college, it did have an impact on how they viewed college and whether or not they decided to “engage” with it. Though the students did not discuss the role the neighborhood played in their immediate decision of whether or not to go to college, they did discuss the Bronx as a whole and how that impacted them personally. Their discussion of the Bronx highlighted an allegiance towards the borough which helped to shape their college-going identity and their resistance to negative aspects of the Bronx experience.
Chapter Five

The Bronx: Pride and Resistance

Unlike many of the other boroughs and municipal entities in NYC, the Bronx has an extensive negative reputation of hopelessness and despair which still plagues the borough decades after the images of the “Bronx is Burning” and the “Bronx Zoo” seeped into people’s imagination. These images of the Bronx, unlike many NYC neighborhoods, have reached many people outside of the borough and state. Before I discuss how the Bronx has impacted students’ college dispositions, a brief historical overview of the Bronx is warranted.

The Bronx beginnings

The beginnings of the Bronx were shaped by people who wanted to escape the “Big City” and move to a more rural area of New York, which would still allow them access to the city. The Bronx was originally seen as an early suburb of NYC, to which many people flocked, some of whom were very wealthy. The Bronx was known for its plush land and its access to the shores. Many country clubs were established, and the Bronx has the oldest municipal golf course in the country —Van Courtland Golf course— which was built on land owned by the Courtlandts, a very prominent family who resided in the area. The Bronx as a popular residential destination changed after World War II, when the demographics of the Bronx began to shift.

The post WWII shift in Bronx demographics has been characterized as "white flight,” with many Irish, German and Jewish residents leaving for the suburbs, and the “browning of the streets" with Blacks and Latinos moving into the borough. In his work documenting Hip-Hop, Chang (2005) identified a potential catalyst in this demographic
shift. The Cross Bronx Expressway was constructed by Robert Moses as a major urban project which would allow workers from the suburbs of upstate NY and Connecticut access to their jobs. The expressway displaced many, and contributed to the loss of manufacturing jobs (Caro, 1974).

During the early 1970s, landlords seeking to push out tenants burned down dilapidated apartment complexes to collect insurance money. This is the birth of some of the current images of the Bronx, and the origin of the term “the Bronx is Burning.” As a result, the Bronx became a symbol of urban blight nationwide, some would argue globally, and was the epicenter of national debates as to who was to blame for the ills. Some argued that the Bronx and its downward spiral was a result of ‘benign neglect’ by government officials who allowed the Bronx to reach unprecedented conditions of poverty and urban despair (Chang, 2005).

The Bronx and its 16th Congressional District is the poorest congressional district in the United States. I hear this on a daily basis at work, or in other interactions with Bronxites. Though this may be true, the Bronx has much to offer, as it has outgrown and moved past those images of the Bronx which existed 40 years ago.

The Bronx today

Though the Bronx currently does not reflect the rampant despair of the 60’s and 70’s, its stigmatized reputation has endured. Recently, for example, an article by The New York Post uncovered how a NYC-based travel agency provides visitors of mostly European descent the opportunity to see “a real-live Bronx Ghetto.” The tour promises sights of real life pantry lines and the chance to visit a place they labeled as “Pick-pocket Park”. These tours quickly ceased after the news article was published, but this just
highlights how many of the residents in the borough continuously fight an uphill battle to repair the negative images which still plague the Bronx.

When tourists visit NY, they will not venture out to visit the Bronx. Even some residents of other boroughs will not venture to the Bronx unless they are going to a Yankee game or visiting one of the major city parks like the Bronx Zoo or the Botanical Gardens. As a resident of the Bronx I’ve lost count of how many people I’ve met from around the country who often proudly exclaim they have been to the Bronx to Yankee Stadium or the Bronx Zoo. There are also those people I’ve met who have never been to NY, and want to discuss their “knowledge” of the Bronx, by initiating conversations about the Yankees. But to many, the Bronx continues to live in the past, conjuring images of burnt out building, drug dealers on every corner, and crime.

For this dissertation I did a Google search of images of the South Bronx. What appears are old images of the Bronx, depicting the Bronx as if its current condition is unchanged from 40 years ago. Though many Bronx youth are not aware of all the intricate details of why this negative discourse looms over the borough they call home, they are well aware of the current struggles they face on a daily basis. This was discussed by many students in this study. Although the Bronx offers these students many challenges, the Bronx also serves as their strength, for they all talk about the pride that is developed through their resistance to the stigmatized vision of the Bronx. Following is the views that Daniel, Kevin, David and Marvin held about The Bronx, and the role of the neighborhood in their decision to go to college.

The students and the Bronx

Daniel: The Bronx as impetus to resist
Daniel believed deeply that the neighborhood, along with the family, played an important part in the decision to go to college:

Part is your family and your neighborhood because those are the two things that control you. People think that the media doesn’t control you like that because they just displays images, you choose whether to follow them. But your family and your neighborhood, that’s what you’re around all the time. So, those are the voices in your head, they put these different ideas into your head. (April, 2010)

Daniel believes that the influence of both family and neighborhood far exceeded most other factors when it comes to making decisions, especially when determining to attend college. In his opinion, these two “voices” as Daniel refers to them, or fields for the purpose of this study, have the greatest impact on students since these are the two social structures with which students interact most frequently. What Daniel is describing here, in a simplistic way, is the relationship between the field and the creation of the habitus, as described by Bourdieu. These “voices” as Daniel describes them, are actually the messages he is receiving from the field which are being transformed into dispositions that live inside of the habitus. Daniel felt that the neighborhood and the family had such a deep impact at decision-making time that they provided metaphorical “voices” which worked at a conscious or subconscious cognitive level. This is similar to how Bourdieu described the theoretical tool of habitus.

As Daniel continued to describe how the environment/neighborhood impacts individuals, Daniel recalled a peer he knew which had “succumbed” to the negative influences of the neighborhood. He states:

For example, a kid that I saw in my neighborhood, we used to take the bus like every other day. He’s a little kid about 7 or 8 at that time. Now the kid’s walking around, like everybody else in the neighborhood, he is selling drugs, but when he was little, you wouldn’t think that he be that type of kid. (April, 2010).
Though Daniel’s interaction and navigation of his neighborhood yielded different circumstances than the “kid” he described, Daniel constantly conveyed that he was well aware of what could happen if you subscribed to the lifestyle of his neighborhood.

Daniel’s eyewitness account of how the Bronx impacted this young individual made him step back and analyze the situation. He recognized how much of a negative impact his neighborhood could have on him. Daniel went on to state that for some, “the environment takes over pretty much. If you allow the environment to control the type of person you are, then that’s when you become — messed up” (April, 2010). Daniel believed that a neighborhood shouldn’t define you, and he was adamant about resisting the temptations and influence of his environment. Daniel was aware of the perceptions people had of certain neighborhoods and schools in the Bronx and wanted to prove individuals wrong when they began to construct images of who he may be based on preconceived connotations. He states:

Yeah because say, from high school, whatever neighborhood you’re from, you’re supposed to act a different way. And I look at it like this, I lived in a bad neighborhood but it doesn’t make me a bad person. So, if you allow the environment to control the type of person you’re going to be, then that’s when you mess up. (April 2010).

Daniel did not want his neighborhood to define the type of person he was. He was intent on resisting these stereotypes and providing his own narrative and path in life. He was well aware of how, if you let it, an individual’s neighborhood could persuade a person to act in a particular way. Daniel discussed how a particular neighborhood could impact individuals’ pathways and could provide potential barriers, like the example he provided, but it could also become a resource, as in Daniel’s case, in the form of resistance.
Kevin: Pride in resisting the Bronx

Kevin took the discussion outside of the neighborhood and provided illustrations of how the Bronx impacts students’ decision-making, especially when it comes to higher education. Like all other students, Kevin was aware of what it meant to be from the Bronx and the perceptions outsiders may have of its residents. Though Kevin was aware of the negative stigma and how it can shape perceptions, he used this negative construct to motivate him in future endeavors. Like many students whom I have worked with in the past, the Bronx for Kevin is the forgotten borough. He states:

That just makes it even deeper because the Bronx is basically, I consider the mysterious borough. Nobody knows about it. Nobody cares about it. It’s always Brooklyn’s clean. It’s Manhattan. Mostly Manhattan, but Staten Island is a borough, those suburbs. Nobody cares about Staten Island either, but nobody wants to come up here. (April, 2010)

Kevin, like many students, is aware of how the Bronx is continuously overshadowed by its past reputation as a drug-infested poor ghetto. Kevin expresses his frustration that the Bronx is seen as only for poor minorities:

Everybody thinks this is far and it’s just filled with people who are low income and ghetto. I don’t know. There’s just a lot of issues over here. It’s like that in Brooklyn too, but there are some good areas too in Brooklyn. Here it’s just mostly minorities. (April, 2010)

Kevin's description of the Bronx is filled with “negativity,” as a place only for poor minorities. Because of this, Kevin expresses the urge to leave and escape the borough through his aspirations to attend college. He provides a couple of reasons for his thinking:

I do not want to stay here in The Bronx. I’m tired of being part of this low-income lifestyle. I don’t want to grow up into something that the rest of my family members have grown up to because basically I’m one of the first of my generation to go to college. My mom didn’t go to college nor my grandparents, and I don’t think most of my aunts went to college. (April, 2010)
Kevin discusses the opportunity he has to leave the Bronx and feels as if he can do so by going away to college. Though Kevin eventually does not go away for college, throughout the entire data collection process Kevin expressed his willingness to leave not only his neighborhood, but especially the Bronx. This urge and need to leave is driven by his determination to pursue and live a better lifestyle than that of others in his family. He also strives to live a better life than what he believes he could achieve if he remains in the Bronx. For Kevin, the field of the Bronx provides not only instances and images of negativity and despair; it also provides him with the drive to aspire for a better future and place.

Kevin believes that by surviving life in the Bronx and eventually leaving, you earn a “badge of honor” which for many “survivors” establishes a sense of pride and accomplishment:

When you hear I’m from the Bronx, you see pride, and you say, ‘he came from this place because this is not expected from this place.’ That’s how I feel. I feel like I have pride coming from here, but because it’s the Bronx – do you understand? (April, 2010)

For me as the researcher and Bronx resident Kevin’s views were easy to understand. The issues people face in the Bronx are similar to that in many urban poor communities around the country. What makes the Bronx different from many of these communities is the reputation which precedes it. When I tell non-New Yorkers that I am from the Bronx, there is either a sense of “wow,” as if ‘How did the Bronx produce a person like you?’ , or an expression of “oh!” as if they are sorry for me. This is the sense of pride Kevin is alluding to, a sense of pride that you, as a Bronx native, are challenging the norms. For Kevin his pride resides in eventually escaping the Bronx: “I just feel
proud that I’m from here and I’m getting out of here. That’s it” (April, 2010). For many students, this is their reality. They are leaving a borough that has shaped who they are and their perceptions of the world, but they have pride in surviving life in the Bronx and being able to speak of it.

**Marvin and David: Resisting the Bronx after Washington Heights and Honduras**

Marvin and David were two students who were not born nor grew up in the Bronx. They both came to the Bronx later in their childhood, so they were able to provide a different perspective of life in the Bronx and how it impacted their educational trajectory. Marvin discussed the differences between the Bronx and Washington Heights, a neighborhood in Manhattan whose residents are mostly Dominican. When questioned about the Bronx, Marvin believes that “there’s a lot of similarities” between the Bronx and Washington Heights. He associates these similarities when comparing schools, as he thinks back to his time at school in Washington Heights and his time now in a Bronx school. He says:

> Like, I’m trying to think of my school and who’s a Latino from the Bronx and for some reason I’m just thinking of all these kids from The Heights, in my mind, but I can’t really see much of a difference really, with myself. Between going to school in The Heights and in going to school in the, like you know The Heights and here, I can’t see much of a difference. I guess I would say aside from education, I feel safer in The Heights. (April, 2010)

The only difference that Marvin could identify between school in Washington Heights and the Bronx is the fact that he felt safer in The Heights. Though he felt safer in The Heights than in the Bronx, Marvin later associated this with the fact that he grew up in The Heights and knew more people. Marvin was well aware of the reputation of the Bronx.

David, on the other hand, compared growing up in his home country of Honduras to
growing up in the Bronx. Since David was not born in the United States and arrived later in his childhood, David provided vivid memories of what it was like to be educated in Honduras and was able to compare it to growing up in the Bronx. David discussed how while he was a student in Honduras, his focus was not on school, but on securing employment to assist his family with their bills. He acknowledges that if he were still in his home country, he “would have to go to work.” He does recognize that “It’s still my decision to study; but in my country, I didn’t have the motivation to study.” Because the emphasis in his country, specifically for males, was not to study but to gain employment, he had little motivation to go to school in Honduras: “I used to go to school and joke around and stuff, but I think that when I got here and I saw my mother’s effort and everything, I really regretted all this”. For David, seeing his mother struggle to support his family, as well as being able to escape the Bronx provided him with motivation to succeed in school. David wanted more than what was being offered to him, and he saw college as a way to leave the struggles and lifestyle of the Bronx behind.

Conclusion

Though the students’ environment, especially the Bronx, did have an impact on how they viewed and engaged with the educational process, it didn’t have an adverse effect on their ambitions and aspirations to utilize education as a vehicle towards upward mobility. The students’ collectively talked about struggle and perseverance when discussing their surroundings and how it has impacted their trajectory. Whether it is seeing a peer’s disposition change from a “good student” to “street hustler” or seeing family members struggle and aspiring for a better life, all the students used what they witnessed on a daily basis in the Bronx to help motivate them.
Most outsiders would assume that the environment in the Bronx would be a huge barrier to overcome. Though that may be true for some, these students found inspiration to rise above it all. The Bronx played the role of facilitator and helped these students stay more focused on getting to college. The struggles in the Bronx made them stronger.
Chapter Six

Family

There is research that identifies the family as an important component in a students’ education (Lareau, 2011). Whether it is instilling in students the social or cultural capital needed to be successful or the family being viewed as an explanation of why students do not succeed in school, family is always viewed as a key component. In this dissertation students discussed and identified various instances where their family played a role in either creating a barrier in their academic success or instances where students viewed their family as a resource in their transition. This section will analyze some of the interactions students had with family members which may have created potential or real barriers in their attempt to transition from high school to college.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Daniel, like many of the students in the study, had a strong belief that family along with neighborhood were the most significant contributing factors in educational success. He said, as I quoted in the previous chapter:

Part is your family and your neighborhood because those are the two things that control. People think that the media doesn’t control you like that because they just display images, you choose whether to follow them. But your family and your neighborhood, that’s where you’re around all the time. So, those are the voices in your head, they put these different ideas into your head. (April, 2010)

As will be discussed later in this section, this sentiment was shared by the majority of students in this study. Family was discussed time and time again as playing a major role in their decision to attend college, and yet most students felt that their family’s role was not helpful, creating doubt and anger, the subject of the next section.

Family Creating Doubt and Anger

Many of the students in the study discussed how expectations placed upon them
by certain family members would sometimes create feelings of doubt and painted an unrealistic view of college. For example, students discussed how expectations placed upon them based on their birth order would create family dynamics which were not conducive to the college transition. Being the first-born male in the family, for some students, produced an extreme amount of pressure and expectations. For others, being the last born in their family created different expectations based upon what their siblings accomplished, or did not accomplish. For others, expectations were related to other family members, which made them angry. Yet others were angered by their parents’ taking credit for their wanting to go to college. And for others the parents’ interest were too little, too late. These are the stories we hear next.

**Expectations related to Birth order: Diego and Daniel**

In the case of Diego, his family had different expectations of him as the first-born and looked at him to set a good example for the rest of his siblings. Diego stated: “I say the expectations are higher because I am the first-born. I’m the first born, so I was always like, they [his parents] are always straight with me with schools. Always straight with me with college and they have really high expectations” (April, 2010). Diego’s family placed high expectations upon him based upon his birth order. He was looked at by his parents, as a role model for his siblings, and needed to set a good example for them.

Daniel, on the other hand, felt as if he had it a bit easier than his two older siblings and learned a lot from their mistakes. During our discussion about his family and their expectations Daniel stated:

I think the expectations are higher for me, because when my sister went to school, she’s the first one. So, it was like, there’s no background basically. So, she went away for a semester. She came back to the city. So then, my brother went to
college for a semester; he wanted to go away, go miles. My parents didn’t want to because they saw what happened to my sister. So, by the time when it came to me, I have the idea, I’m going to stay here. I have to do good in college because my sister, she got her associate but she still didn’t finish her bachelors. My brother didn’t go to college but he is doing his real estate thing. Me, I have to go to college or what else am I going to do. (April, 2010)

During his transition, Daniel’s siblings’ experience with higher education and their struggles with college played a significant role in his decision-making process. Daniel saw how both his older sister and brother struggled to just finish college and how leaving New York City to attend school played a role, in his mind, in their lack of completion. Daniel believed he had to do well in college based upon his siblings’ lack of success. For Daniel doing well in college meant staying close to home so his family could help him keep focused on what he had to do. Daniel described this when he talked about his college choice process:

I can’t really describe because, say for my sister, she chose high school, she chose college she wanted to go to herself. She had free-will basically to do what she wanted. My brother the same thing: he chose his colleges but then they looked at him and said, “You can’t go here. You can’t go here. You can’t go here.” Me, they chose my high school, but I’m pretty much choosing my college even though I have limited amount of choices. I’m choosing my college. So, they [his parents] were hard for her [his sister] in high school because she really had good grades. By the time they got to me, they want me to do good in high school, but we’re not as tough for me, I would say. (April, 2010)

According to Daniel, he felt as if his parents were the hardest on his sister, because she was the first-born. Because they were especially hard on her she excelled in high school, but struggled in college. Daniel’s parents allowed his sister to basically choose whatever high school and college she wanted to attend because his parents didn’t have anything to base this process on. Similarly, his brother was allowed autonomy in his decision-making process, but slightly less than his sister. Unlike his sister, Daniel’s older brother was
allowed to choose the high schools and colleges he wanted to apply to, but his parents had the final decision on what school he was going to attend. Daniel, because of his birth order as youngest, had the least amount of autonomy in picking the high school he wanted to attend. He felt as if his parents were harder on him, because of what they had experienced with his older brother and sister. Because of this control, Daniel at times felt frustrated with the decision-making process, and was very adamant about picking the college he wanted to attend. In Daniel’s eyes, this was a big deal. He was allowed to make the final decision on what school he wanted to attend, though it was from a very select few schools based upon cost of attendance and geographic location. Even though Daniel was able to pick what college he wanted to attend, he ultimately chose to stay close to home based upon the struggles of his older siblings. According to Daniel, his birth order in the family played a significant role in his education and how his parents surveyed his progress. Daniel stated:

They [his siblings] have to get 85 average or higher. If they have anything lower than 80, they’ll [his parents] be really like pissed off. They would be pissed off at me, but it was as well, I got it easier, I would say…. I think it’s more about me being the third child than a male, because they were harder on both my sister and my brother. (April, 2010)

For both Daniel and Diego, the order of birth in their family created expectations when it came to college. For Diego, he had to pave the way for his younger siblings and had to set a good example. His parents viewed him as a trailblazer and attached a great deal of responsibility in his transition and success. For Daniel, being the youngest of his siblings also created an expectation for him in his college transition. His parents viewed him as the last chance to right the wrongs of his older siblings. Daniel, because of his birth position, also felt an inordinate amount of pressure to make sure he did not follow down
the same path as his two older siblings. These family expectations played a minor role in establishing potential barriers in the transitions.

**Expectations related to others in the family: Kevin**

Kevin felt an enormous amount of pressure from his extended family concerning his future. Kevin discussed how in his family he was constantly being compared to one of his cousins, who was academically successful as well. This created an uneasiness for Kevin, who wanted to be known for his own accomplishments. Kevin discussed:

Like before, they used to compare me to my cousin a lot. My aunt used to compare me to my cousins, like, ‘Kevin does this, Kevin does that.’ I hated it. They didn’t know about my flaws. I’ve done so much things that were like not good. It was kind of between my household but some things came out, like now they don’t think I’m that perfect anymore. (April, 2010)

Kevin was not fond of this comparison. Kevin felt as if the expectations placed upon him and the perception of his perfection were unwarranted. Though Kevin was a high performing student and stayed out of trouble, he knew he was not perfect and had many flaws. The stress behind maintaining a perfect image was something Kevin was uncomfortable with and resisted against. Kevin stated:

Like I said, in my family I’m one of the first in my generation to go to college or graduate from college maybe because my mom didn’t graduate high school. My aunts, some of them didn’t graduate high school. Some of them did but they didn’t get to finish college or even go to college. (April, 2010)

Since Kevin performed well in school and was going to college, his family perceived him as flawless and perfect. To Kevin, his success in school did not make him perfect or flawless, and these expectations and perception of him were all unwanted. As Kevin said, “but I know one time my father probably expected me and my brother to be in the streets or whatever just because that’s how life is. But I know it’s expected of us probably not to
go to college” (April, 2010). The expectations his father had of him and his brother were based upon the lived experiences of the other males in Kevin’s family. As Kevin stated, “My uncles I’ve mentioned, that all they’ve done was, I don’t know about high school but all they’ve done was live and sell drugs, become alcoholics and go to jail” (April, 2010). Because Kevin’s uncles lived experiences were filled mostly of drugs, alcoholism and jail time, Kevin’s father did not initially envision Kevin as having the potential to be successful in school. Kevin’s father’s one time expectation of him did not bother Kevin and he did not take offense to it. As Kevin illustrated:

In my eyes, what I’ve been seeing or what I’ve known and what I think of it’s like people get used to be dealing with whatever’s out here, like whatever their family have been through, either being a drop-out or graduating from high school but not going to college. They’re just dealing with it and they’re satisfied with it…. I think it’s expected not to go to college but if they are going to college then that’s a good thing in their eyes. They’ll be like, ‘That’s great. I would like for you to go’. (April, 2010)

For Kevin, it is all about expectations and life experiences. Kevin believed it is easy to become content with your current situation, because that is all you know. So for his father to think he was going to be just like his uncles did not upset him since that was the experience of others around him. Expectations of not going to college are the norm, even though he eventually graduated as valedictorian from his high school.

**Family taking credit and creating anger: Manolo**

Manolo was almost ashamed of his family, specifically his older brother and sister, and took offense when his family took credit or congratulated him on his accomplishments. He stated:

My mother and my father take credit for everything. I hate that about them. Like my mother, I won't let them... my initial plan was not to tell her know anything until I have to pay the deposit. She took the credit for it, of course. My father's
taking the credit for me... he said I'm going to be a biologist. His pal, like he had anything to do with this. Not only that, he had nothing to do with the college thing on the whole... My whole life had nothing to do with him. He's making me mad. My mother hasn't really said anything but brag about it to family members. My brother who I don't really speak to either, the last time I spoke to him was a few months back. He was trying to, in a way, convince me to stay around or something, and I was like - "No, I'm leaving." We didn't get to finish that conversation, and we never finished it. (April, 2010)

Manolo expressed his frustration towards his family, specifically his mother and father.

Manolo felt as if his accomplishment was a product of his hard work and his family had little to do with his success. His mother and father taking “credit” and bragging about him going to college infuriated Manolo. Though he lived with his mother, he felt as if she also had little to do with his accomplishments. Manolo was especially upset about his father’s exuberance when he had been absent the majority of Manolo’s life. Manolo stated:

> He makes me really, really mad. I don't know. He's telling me that... I know this is not supposed to make me mad, but it does because he said, “Oh, do really good in school, and make me proud. He sounded like he, in any way, had anything to do with the process. I don't like that, (April, 2010)

His father’s insinuation to Manolo that he should “make him proud” really disturbed Manolo. Manolo’s transition to college made him reevaluate his family and the role they have had in his development. Prior to this process, Manolo felt as if family in general played a large role in not only his development, but of others around him. As Manolo reflected on his family and their expectations for his future he stated:

> I thought family has a part in it but I think in my case it doesn’t because we were all given the same expectations but it was like the people that have their goal but they don't know how to get there. Our family threw the goal at us, but they don’t help us get there. They didn't think of all sides either. For anyone, girl, boy, young and old, pretty much my mother's generation, there's a lot of them, didn't make it, past high school and so the expectations were not generally that high. (April, 2010)

Though Manolo’s family was large in size, they had few if any high achievers in
education, so anything past a high school diploma was viewed as successful. The expectation was to do better than his mother’s generation. Manolo pointed out how his family placed these expectations upon him, but did not provide any guidance in how to accomplish these goals. His family was unable to help him, because none of them had accomplished what he was striving for. The lack of cultural capital in his family, particularly institutional cultural capital, left Manolo to “fend” for himself throughout the college transition. Manolo discussed how in his family, he, nor his brother received much support.

As previously discussed, Manolo’s struggles with his mother and father over celebrating his success and taking “credit” for it angered Manolo. While discussing why Manolo was so adamant towards attending college outside of NYC, he stated:

*If I do stay in the Bronx…let's say Hostos, that implies that I have to stay in the city. My mom doesn't want me to stay in the house and I'd probably be dealing with some other people [have to move elsewhere].* (April, 2010)

Although Manolo’s mom felt free enough to express her jubilation in Manolo going to college, she is unwilling to allow Manolo to live at home while he attended college. Because of this, Manolo felt going away was his only option. This feeling of being unwanted in his household was one of the driving factors as to why he felt as if his mother should not be taking credit for his success. According to Manolo the emotional distance between his mother and himself was something that was not uncommon in his family dynamic. He shared how both his grandmother and father allowed both him and his brother free rein while they resided with them, both in the Dominican Republic and the brief time he lived with his father in Philadelphia. As Manolo explained:

*Probably the fact that my grandmother didn't really crack down on him [his brother] like that, he’s probably that wild, I don’t know. And my father tried, but I*
mean when you come here [to the US], he came here fifteen, what can the teachers care for a fifteen year old? When we came here we were pretty much let loose. That's the time when we lived with our father. He cracked down on our sisters pretty bad, but not us two. But that was short lived, most of the time we lived here and my mother doesn't crack down on anyone, just pretty much loose on anything. (April, 2011)

According to Manolo, the lack of “cracking down” or discipline in his family is what caused the distance between him, his mother, father and the rest of his family. Manolo felt as if his family took a hands-off approach with him throughout his teen years, which allowed him and his brother to do what they wanted. Since this distance existed, he felt uncomfortable with the thought of his mother, father or anyone in his family taking credit for any of his success. His accomplishments were his own to claim and celebrate.

*Expectations too little, too late: Nelson*

_Nelson_ discussed how receiving little motivation from his family played a role in his transition. Nelson had a difficult time recalling many conversations with members of his family concerning college. Moreover, Nelson felt as if his mother never urged him to go to college while he was younger. It wasn’t until she found out he was going to have to repeat his senior year that she discussed the possibility of going to college. Nelson stated:

> Everything is like, “Oh just go to sleep, don’t stay up late, make sure you did your homework” and that’s it. It was never like, “How do you feel about college? Do you plan on going?” She’s never like that. (April, 2010)

While recalling his earlier years in high school, Nelson had a difficult time recalling conversations he had with his mother about his progress outside of “did you do your homework”. To Nelson, his mother was more concerned about his homework and him going to sleep early, than his future in college. Nelson’s mother became more concerned about his progress and his potential to go to college after she found out that he was going to repeat the 12th grade. Nelson stated:
I always knew that I was always going to have to repeat a year, but since she was told – I had a meeting and she was there and they finally said it like, “Look he’s going to have to repeat a year in order to make up those credits”….That’s when she started talking about it like, “Look, I know you love music and I know you want to pursue that dream, but college is a better opportunity and you have to do your stuff.” (April, 2010)

Nelson was aware of his lack of progress in school and chose to keep this information from his mother. Nelson was in constant denial about his progress, and hoped he would be able to make up the credits before his mother found out. But when it became clear to everyone he was not going to graduate “on time,” a conference was held with his mother.

It is not that Nelson’s mother was not supportive, or did not care about his future. Since Nelson was performing poorly in school and the discourse surrounding him and his future in college was bleak, he leaned toward his passion of music, which his mother supported from time to time. Nelson said:

The thing is that she knows my dream about music and going and trying to be an artist. She pushes me towards education but when she knows that I want to be a singer and stuff she’ll lean over to the music side. Like, “Oh you should try to find yourself a manager or find more gigs and stuff like that.” So, she’ll just side to the thing I’m more into right now. (April, 2010)

As Nelson described in this quote, his mother is supportive of him and his future and supports his passions in life. Nelson’s main passion was music and becoming a performing artist. In supporting her son, his mother suggested he get a manager to help him break into the music industry. This support for his musical passion, in Nelson’s mother’s eyes was not an alternative for his schooling; it was based upon the information she had at the time. Since she was never aware of Nelson’s progress in school, her suggestion was for him to try and pursue a music career. Once she found out that he was not performing well in school, Nelson’s mother tried to encourage him to change his outlook towards college. But for Nelson, his mother’s concern for college and his
progress in school was too late. He expressed to me how he wished this would have come sooner, and how his outlook towards college and school may have been different if she had been more involved and showed more concern earlier in his educational journey:

I think if she was always about it yes, consistently saying…. “Look Nelson you have to do this. You have to prepare yourself to go to college. You have to get good grades and actually do work and not only worry about having friends and whatever. Just do your work for you so you can have a better future”…. If she told me that it would have definitely affected how I thought about college. It would have made me think a lot about what I could do for music to go to college. (April, 2010)

Nelson wished his mother would have provided more guidance and support when it came to college. According to Nelson, if his mother would have just provided some more encouragement and hope that college was an attainable goal, maybe he would have strived to do more than just pursue a music career. Nelson still mentions how music still would have been part of his life goals, but he would have incorporated his musical plans into his college transition if the support had been there.

On the whole, the cases of Diego, Daniel, Kevin, Manolo and Nelson show us that their families were concerned, but just didn’t have a way of supporting them through the college transition. Their expectations were mostly based on the experience of siblings and others in the family, or unreal expectations for them. In summary, the family’s help was not what the students expected or needed. And yet, their families were at their side as they faced the college transition, although because of their lack of experience they communicated anxiety about college. The next section discusses the messages the students got from the family about college.
Family’s warnings about college as dark, lonely and dangerous

Various family members gave advice concerning the college transition. Pablo recalled conversations he had with his cousin, who is currently enrolled at a college. His cousin highlighted the difference between high school and college, saying that college was “extremely different because high school they (the students) are like fooling around and you have till this day to finish the paper. But in college they just give (you) a syllabus; even if they didn't turn it in (the work), it’s (your) problem. The teachers don't really care” (April, 2010). Pablo’s recollection of his cousin’s college transition discourse is very similar to the discourse all the students received about college. As highlighted in Pablo’s cousin’s story, the messages students received from various people, including family members, was about college as a “dark and lonely” place where no one was concerned about students, their performance or success.

Parents and family members also provided words of caution around some of the perceived negative activity that takes place on many campuses. Diego’s parents had a talk with him about avoiding the use of alcohol and drugs, which they felt many college students abused. Diego stated that his parents told him to be careful about all “things about being in college. Alcohol, drugs and… you know.” For Diego, his parents were creating an image of college as a potentially bad place, where you have to be careful of a culture of alcohol and drugs. Although students spoke in detail about the messages they received from their family, they spoke more about the messages they received from personnel in school. These messages often times confused students who did not know what to expect when they finally enrolled in college.

Although students found that the family’s expectations and messages about their
going to college created in them doubt and anger, their families were also their resources. The next section discusses how, despite the negative messages and expectations about college, the family was a resource to the students in creating the sense that college was important.

**The family’s message about the importance of going to college**

In general, the students discussed how their family members were also a resource, how various family members instilled in them the importance of college and supported their decision to attend. In addition, family members also provided the motivation and inspiration to aspire to go to college, set an expectation that they were going to college, provided information about the transition, and discussed the impact of becoming a role model to younger siblings. Conversations ran the gamut, but for all the participants the interactions with their families impacted their decisions to aspire and eventually attend college. This section of the dissertation will discuss how these familial resources impacted the students positively and how the students drew on that family capital while making the transition.

**David wanting better for his family**

David’s family was extremely proud of the fact that he was going to attend college. David, as mentioned previously, was the only student in the study who had arrived recently in the United States. David, unlike many of the other students in the study, struggled with English and was an emergent bilingual student. Despite the fact that English was not his strong language, David would not allow his acquisition of another language stop him from aspiring to go to college. David discussed how the drive to go to college and do well in school was instilled in him by his mother. David’s mother never
attended college, which limited her cultural capital and the conversations she was able to have with David concerning the transition. Despite these shortcomings, David’s mother did encourage him all the time to get a good education, which eventually meant obtaining a college degree.

The conversations David had with his mother usually consisted of her urging him to do well in school and constantly instilling in him the importance of college. David recalled multiple conversations he had with his mother and her unwavering message to him. David stated:

I always talk about how people live without going to college. My mother always said, she would always tell me, “Go to college so that you don’t have the same life as me.” I always used to talk to her about how important it is to go to college. (April, 2010)

Though David’s mother never attended college, she knew the value of a college education in the United States, and constantly urged David to attend. David’s mother did not want to see him struggle economically as she had. David’s mother believed that if David attended and graduated from college, he would struggle less in life. These conversations impacted David deeply and were a major source in his aspiration to go to college. As David shared, her mother “believes that by getting an education it is the way to get a better life, and she wants to give me a better life and she wants me to help her also live a better life” (April, 2010). David’s mother not only viewed his success in college as a vehicle for his mobility, but for herself as well. The expectation for David as the oldest male in the family was that he would eventually provide for not only himself, but also for the rest of his family members. David took great pride in his responsibility which he shared with me on several occasions.

David was well aware of the fact that being the oldest male in his family brought
about specific expectations. These expectations would not only impact him, but the rest of his family as they looked to him for support and guidance. David’s mother viewed his success in school as the family’s success, and was counting on David to provide an eventual better life not only for herself, but for the rest of the family.

David’s younger brother, who still lived in Honduras, looked up to David and viewed him as a role model and trailblazer. David acknowledged the fact that he had several conversations with his younger brother concerning college, the transition, and often encouraged him, just as his mother did with him, to do well in school and go to college:

He is younger than me and I explained to him what goes on in college because sometimes, some people might lie to you about what happens in college, but I told my brother, “You know, we’re brothers,” so I’m going to tell him everything that’s true and everything that’s a lie about college. I will tell him everything that goes on. How the teacher behaves and how you got to deal with some things. I do it so he can get some experience. (May, 2010)

David, as the older brother, felt an obligation to share with his younger brother his experience with college. He wanted to make sure his brother was provided with “truthful” information about the transition and experience while in college. David embraced his role as a possible cultural translator (Anda, 1984; Barajas & Peirce, 2001), knowing that he had very few people during his transition who were able to play this role. For David, providing “the truth” to his brother concerning college was something he held in high regard and was something he shared with his brother on a constant basis. David believed that because of these conversations his brother “listens. It's interesting for him because I think he also wants to go to college. He wants to know about his future” (May, 2010). David believed that his conversations were impacting his younger brother, and because of them he was also aspiring to go to college. David’s responsibility as a role model for his
younger brother goes beyond just having conversations with him about college. As the older male in his family, David not only had the responsibility to eventually provide for himself, but also his mother and younger siblings. This responsibility goes beyond just providing the necessities, but also consists of having to eventually pay for some or all of his brother’s education. David never seemed resentful about these responsibilities, but actually embraced them. At times he even seemed enthusiastic about the responsibility and shared with me that he “will work. I will work so that I will make him better than good. Actually, when I get a better job, I’m going to send him to Harvard” (May, 2010).

David was well aware that his success would translate into the success for others in his family, and he willingly embraced this responsibility and used it as motivation for him to do well in school and go to college. David bought into his mother’s mantra about education as a vehicle of upward social mobility, and provided the same message to his younger brother.

David’s family encouraged him to take advantage of his current circumstance and to not squander his opportunity. David recalled how he had conversations with his older sister, who was not able to attend college. David recounts some of the detail of his conversation with his sister. He stated she:

usually talks to me about college and she always tells me to not waste this opportunity to go to college. I see that many of them [his family], they wanted to go to college but at the time, things happen and now I have the opportunity. I want to do the best I can. (April, 2010)

David witnessed how his sister and other elder family members had aspired to go to college, but because of “situations” they were unable to attend. This was a source of motivation for David as he wanted to do the best he could not only for himself, but also for his family and future family members. As David stated:
I feel that I have to do it for myself but also for the rest of the family. I think I have to do the best I can, not only for the people that are very dear to me but also for the future, my future family. (April, 2010)

Sometimes these high expectations would weigh on David so much that he found himself occasionally struggling with the transition. When this occurred, David often turned towards his family for support. Often David’s family was able to put everything into perspective, and were a resource for him during his transition. This situation played out as college enrollment neared. This caused him to worry about his potential success/future and caused him anxiety. Because of his close relationship with his family, David felt comfortable sharing this anxiety with one of his aunts:

She asked, “Why do you say that college is hard?” I then realized the reason why I said that it is; because the environment I live around, that everybody tells me this is hard. These things are impossible and things like that, but she told me that college is “not easy but it’s not so hard.” You just got to do whatever you have to do. Get used to it, to the life and college. (April, 2010)

Despite never attending college, David’s aunt was able to ease his mind about the college transition. She understood that getting a college degree would not be the easiest thing to accomplish, but made David understand that it was not impossible. She warned David that he would have to get used to college life, and once he transitioned, things would become more manageable. During this conversation, David also realized that a lot of his anxiety about college was coming from the discourse which surrounded the transition. The constant chatter of college and its difficulty had begun to weigh on David. He realized the source of the discourse was those people who surrounded him and the messages he was receiving from the field. David’s aunt was able to help center David by not “sugar coating” the transition and also warning him of potential struggles. This conversation reinvigorated David about going to college.
David shared with me how his mother continuously bragged to others about his college acceptance. As David stated: “She talks to people, ‘Oh, my son is going to college.’ She never told me that ‘Oh, yeah. I'm proud because you're going to college,’ but I know her. I know she's proud of me” (May, 2010). Though David’s mother never shared with him how proud she was about his acceptance to college, he knew by her actions how proud she was. The fact that she would brag to others spoke volumes to David and helped to motivate him to do the best he could. David felt his family played a huge role in him aspiring to go to college. They were his source of inspiration and a resource he could rely on during the uneasy college transition. As David stated: “I think that they did encourage me. I think that the strongest thing that encouraged me to go to college is my family and my desire to break the limits” (April, 2010). David’s responsibility to his family, the encouragement he received from various family members, and his desire to do better contributed to David’s college disposition and aspirations.

**Pablo’s Mother and Brother Paving the way**

Pablo’s family dynamic was different from David’s but it still served as inspiration and as a resource during his transition. As mentioned previously, Pablo’s mother had graduated from college in the Dominican Republic and his brother was currently attending school through a Union benefit at his job. Both Pablo’s mother and brother served as a resource for Pablo as he made his college transition. For Pablo, college was the expectation not only in his nuclear family but his extended family as well. Pablo had many family members outside of his nuclear family who attended college. He shared:

All of my cousins have already graduated from college. I have one cousin who is graduating the 12th of June. All of them value education a lot. I have two cousins
Going to college was not uncommon in Pablo’s family. From early on Pablo recalled the constant message conveyed to him, “Pablo, you got to go to college” (April, 2010). Doing well in school and going to college was an expectation which his family persistently relayed to him and other family members. Pablo said: “My family thinks education is important. I don't see anything affecting me going to college” (May, 2010). Though both of Pablo’s parents believed in college and conveyed the importance of college, it was Pablo’s mother who pushed Pablo the most to attend. Pablo recalled how his mother would “just tell me that college is kind of mandatory for me” (April, 2010).

Unlike David, whose family pushed and urged him to go to college and take advantage of the opportunity to attend college, Pablo’s mother made it clear from early on that college was mandatory for him. Pablo’s mother became actively involved in his college transition beginning his junior year in high school. He stated:

It all began around junior year, the beginning of junior year. She heard from her friends that junior year is the time that we start looking into schools and start applying. (April, 2010)

Pablo’s mother was constantly in the “background” making sure he made the transition. Leading up to and during the application process, Pablo’s mom would consistently check in with him and his progress. She would ask him “Have you applied yet?”, to which he would often reply: “Yes, and that's the end of it” (April, 2010). Pablo’s mother trusted him and knew he would make the right decisions, but made sure he was responsible during the application process. This constant checking in and prodding lasted throughout the transition process. She wanted to attend college fairs and functions with Pablo, but he urged her to stay home. Though Pablo’s mom did not attend the functions, she would
often check in with him about the information he received. He constantly told her “all the information that they told me and that there was nothing new” (May, 2010). Pablo’s mother insisted on being actively involved in the transition process. She made sure Pablo was on time with everything and constantly drove home the message that college was not an option. Receiving an advanced degree and attending college was a message that not only Pablo received, but something his older brother experienced as well.

Pablo referred to and looked up to his older brother. As we said before, Pablo’s brother, despite not attending college as a traditional student, was enrolled in college thanks to his union, which provided him with tuition reimbursement. During our conversations it was obvious that Pablo looked up to his brother and used his brother’s experience in college as a reference for his own transition. While reflecting upon the conversation Pablo’s brother had with his mother and father concerning his educational progress, Pablo recalled his family being supportive of his brother’s decision to attend college through his union. Pablo stated:

I don't remember them having conversations about it. She seemed pretty okay with him getting into -- I think she just wants one of us to get a job. Just know that our future is safe -- job wise, financial wise, I am not sure. (April 2010)

Pablo recalls his mom being content with his brother’s decision as long as it would lead to something better in the future. As Pablo shared, “when she found out that he could get into a job and still go to college at the same time, but it’s not really like a college -- she was okay with it” (April, 2010).

Throughout our conversations Pablo was confused about his brother’s current educational status. At times he referred to his brother’s school as a college, but then there were other times he referred to it as “not college”. Later on, Pablo clarified for me that
his brother attended an actual college, SUNY Empire State, through the union at his job. His enrollment in school was contingent on him being employed at his job and he could only choose one major, Industrial Studies. Upon completion Pablo’s brother would receive an Associates degree. Pablo’s mother would take it upon herself to continue to motivate his brother to continue his education. Pablo shared with me that “sometimes she does tell him that, ‘Maybe you should think about enrolling into college.’ But then there's the part about that he already has his job. Him losing his job would really affects us, a lot” (April, 2011). Like Pablo, his mother was sometimes confused about his brother’s status and would try to convince him to attend “college”. Though Pablo shared with me that his brother did think about enrolling in a different school from time to time, he understood the negative effects it would have on the family. As with David’s family, Pablo’s older brother was expected to help out with the family expenses, so changing his student status or leaving his job would have a negative effect on the family’s finances.

Pablo had a close relationship with his brother and he felt comfortable asking questions about his experience. Pablo shared with me that his brother:

seems to be doing all right because he has college in the morning and work in the afternoon. As soon as he gets home, he just starts writing his papers. He said he has to get it done as soon as possible. So he's not struggling and pulling all-nighters [....] he tells me about all the papers that he needs to write. Stuff like that. (April, 2010)

Pablo was unsure of how well his brother was actually doing in college, but assumed he was doing well since he often found his brother busy writing papers. Pablo’s brother shared with him that since he had limited time, he had to make sure he was well organized and completed his work early in the day. Pablo’s brother also shared with him the workload at Empire College and discussed with him all the papers and written
assignments.

One interesting aspect about Pablo’s relationship with his brother was that the knowledge about college was not a one-way relationship. Even though Pablo was younger than his brother, his brother was intrigued by Pablo’s decision to attend City College. Since his brother saw himself eventually transferring or enrolling at another institution, he asked Pablo often about City College. As Pablo stated, “He is thinking after that he might want to go to college and he wanted to go to Albany or City College. He wants me to tell him how it is. He wants to go to City College” (May, 2010). Pablo’s brother has aspirations to eventually attend a senior college, and was intent on attending City College for its engineering program. As Pablo looked towards his brother as a reference of college life, Pablo’s brother felt comfortable doing the same with Pablo. He wanted Pablo to share with him his experience at City College and wanted to use him as a reference point for his eventual enrollment.

Marvin’s Mom and her early influence in shaping his aspirations

Like David and Pablo, Marvin’s mom played a significant role in shaping his college aspirations. Marvin discussed extensively how his mother had an impact on his college transition. Marvin recalled having conversations with his mother at an early age about college. Marvin shared how he “talked to my mom a little bit one time about college, but I was like really little. I was like 8, 9. She told me. I can’t remember much” (April, 2010). Marvin was the only participant to have a conversation about college at such a young age. Like Pablo, college was an expectation for Marvin. He said: “I didn’t have a choice, but it was expected” (April, 2010). For Marvin, college was an expectation. Marvin shared:
Yeah, but it wasn’t like you don’t have a choice. Like, I feel like they [his parents] will be very disappointed in me if I didn’t go to college, but I don’t wanna say it’s like, “you go to college, you get out of my house,” it’s not something like that. (April, 2010)

Marvin felt as if he had no choice but to attend college, and on the contrary his family would be disappointed. Though there would be disappointment, Marvin clarified that it would not lead to disownment from his family. His college enrollment would not be the breaking point in his family relationship, but would lead to dissatisfaction since his family expected nothing less of him. This expectation probably came from the fact that Marvin was not the first in his family to attend college. As Marvin mentioned:

My mom, from the best of my knowledge, my mom went to college in the Dominican Republic. I don’t know much about my dad. My aunt went to college in DR because they teach over there and you need to go to college to teach. (April, 2010)

Marvin was unclear of all his family’s educational achievements, but was certain that both his mother and aunt went to college in the Dominican Republic. Though he was unclear if both of them had completed their studies, he assumed his aunt obtained a college degree since she was a teacher in the Dominican Republic. Marvin’s family, especially his mother, shaped Marvin’s disposition towards college by having conversations with him and by sharing their experience attending college. Like Pablo, Marvin’s mother also became involved in his transition during the application process.

Marvin described his mother’s involvement in his college transition as “nagging”. During our conversations Marvin detailed how his mother constantly reminded him of upcoming college events/opportunities and was the first to inform Marvin when college propaganda arrived in the mail:

My mom, like every time, you see how you have, how you, go to a school, a school fair, college fairs, you give them the address and stuff and they put you on
the mailing list. My mom is like, “Go to see that school, check it out.” She would think for some reason that, when you’re on the mailing list that college wants you. So, she would always push me. Go check that school out. (April, 2010)

Marvin’s mother was under the impression that every school who sent Marvin a college pamphlet had an interest in him as a potential student, and would encourage him to check out the school. This misinterpretation caused frustration for Marvin because he felt as if he had to constantly explain to his mom how they were not interested but just sending information because he signed up for it at a college fair or visit. Once Marvin was accepted to Hostos Community College, Marvin became relieved that that he did not have to go through this process anymore. Marvin explained:

Actually, I’m kinda happy ‘cause my mom’s done nagging me ‘cause for some reason she thinks that, she sees from mailing they keep sending to our house, those aren’t really like, those aren’t just acceptance letters, just letters so that you know what it’s like going on. My mom keeps saying that all these colleges want me and I’m trying to explain to her that no, it’s just something to read and she keeps telling me… She keeps talking to me this is here for you, this is here for you. She was, she had at one point she thought that I wasn’t very interested in going to college, but now that she knows I’m going to Hostos she’s happier. (May, 2010)

Even after his acceptance to Hostos, there was still some confusion on his mother’s part concerning the mailings Marvin was still receiving. He was still receiving college propaganda from other colleges and universities, and Marvin’s mother thought the letters he was receiving were college acceptance letters. She was still confused about the content of the letters, and Marvin found himself constantly clarifying that the letters he received were just informational letters. Marvin’s mother interpreted his unwillingness to check out the schools as disinterest in attending college, but her concerns changed once Marvin was accepted to Hostos and intended to attend.
Diego’s Family as a Resource and Their Words of Caution

Diego, like Pablo and Marvin, shared with me how college was always an expectation for him. Like the other students, Diego viewed his family as a resource, but did not always rely on them while going through the college transition. During our conversations, Diego discussed how he turned to his family for some advice, but most of the time, as he discussed before, he would look to others for information about his transitions. Diego, similar to others in the study, had at least one parent who attended college. Diego was unsure of both of his parents’ educational level, but believed his father attended APEX technical school when he was younger. Diego stated: “I’m not sure what it is with Dad. It’s like a license maybe and certificate for gaining information” (April, 2010).

Diego knew a bit more about his mother’s education and believed that she attended a two-year college for fashion at one time. Diego recalled:

She went to a college. I think she went to a SUNY school. I forgot which school she went to, but it was a lot easier to get into. She’s working a lot with a lot of businesses like Deutsch Bank. So she has a lot of good jobs so she can say it’s not the school it’s what you take out of it. (May, 2010)

During his conversations with his mom, Diego’s mother discussed with him the importance of a college education during today’s times. Diego’s mom believed that a college education was important, but what you made of your degree was also crucial. She believed that the key to getting a good job was not the school you attended per se, but the choices you made with the opportunities presented to you. Diego’s mom was well aware of the differences in time and expectations. As Diego shared with me, his mom described to him how back when she was growing up and attending school, getting into college and finding a good job was not as competitive:
It was a lot different back then. It was easier. It was not as competitive. The jobs are less scarce now; then they were, back then, so I think, well, a lot of that may be true but I will try and get to best college I can. (May, 2010)

Diego was aware of the differences in time and expectations and he took what his mother shared with him “with a grain of salt.” Diego still wanted to get into the best college possible because he understood that prestige and the “quality” of education you receive could have an impact on social mobility. Diego discussed with me that “name recognition and the quality of education, at least what I think, is what is important” (May, 2010). Despite feeling this way, Diego’s mom was not as optimistic. He discussed how what his “mom says is kind of true, but it’s a lot different back then when she was in college…”(May, 2010). Diego felt as if he could rely on his mom to be a resource for his college transition, but because of the difference in perception concerning the importance of name recognition and the quality of education, Diego knew his mother and father were a limited resource.

While going through the college transition Diego relied mostly on the information he received from his peers and counselor at his school. Diego would check in with his family concerning the transition, but he completed most of the process by himself. Diego said: “I picked schools on my own and I went to them, and they kind of looked over it, but ultimately it’s my decision and all the coming ups” (May, 2010). Though Diego’s parents were hands off with the college he chose to attend, they were very much involved concerning financial aid. They wanted to make sure Diego was careful with his decision concerning financial aid which they emphasized on several occasions. Diego said: “they were like, be careful, with the financial aid” (May, 2010). Both of Diego’s parents were concerned about his financial aid because they were afraid of the possible debt he would
incur if he made a poor decision. Diego shared with me how this message was conveyed to him during one of the conversations Diego had with his mother concerning his potential college choice:

I actually wasn’t going to go Lehman for the first year because I want to take a break, but then my mom was like, “I know it sounds good. It sounds enticing, but what if your package isn’t great then and you can’t go and you give up your spot at Lehman.” (May, 2010)

Because of Diego’s unique situation, where he was rejected from most of the schools he applied to (mentioned previously), Diego was contemplating whether or not he should attend college or just work for a year and then enroll at a later date. Diego’s mom convinced him to attend school, primarily because she was worried he may lose his financial aid package. She did not want Diego to lose his spot and his potential to enroll at Lehman. She convinced him at the last minute to attend Lehman.

This decision was ultimately a good one for Diego because he was later conditionally accepted to Lehigh University with the prerequisite that he attend another college for at least an academic year and maintain a 3.0 average. Attending Lehman for a year allowed Diego to later enroll at Lehigh and offset some of the cost of attendance, since he was able to transfer many of his credits.

Daniel Following in His Family’s Footsteps

Daniel’s family played a significant role helping to shape his college going habitus and was the only student who had family members who attended and graduated from the college he enrolled in, Lehman College. Since Daniel had several members of his immediate family who attended college, Daniel felt as if the expectations were much greater for him. Like the participants discussed before him, Daniel’s mother played a significant role during his transition Daniel said:
She [mother] was happy for me that I got into college at Lehman because both my parents went to Lehman, and my sister goes to Lehman. Either way, she just wants me to go to college […] I think the expectations are higher for me, because when my sister went to school, she was the first one. (May, 2010)

As discussed in a previous section in this chapter, Daniel witnessed both of his older siblings struggle with their transition to college. His older sister was the first to go to college and decided to go away. She struggled academically and eventually had to make her way back home. She was now attending the same college in which Daniel intended to enroll. Daniel felt as if his mother was “happy” that he was going to college, but was not overly excited because it was expected of him. Daniel was unique to the study because he had the opportunity to learn from his older siblings college mistakes, something Daniel constantly emphasized throughout our discussions. His siblings’ struggles played a significant role in shaping his college habitus and how he engaged with the college transition. In his description of what he witnessed, Daniel articulates how it impacted him. He began by sharing how his sister was the first to go away and how his brother then followed. He stated:

So, it was like, there’s no background basically. So, she went away for a semester. She came back to the city. So, then my brother went to college for a semester, he wanted to go away, like miles away. My parents didn’t want him to because they saw what happened to my sister. So, by the time it came to me, I have the idea, I’m going to stay here. I have to do good in college because my sister, she got her associate but she still didn’t finish her bachelors. My brother didn’t go to college but he is doing his real estate thing. Me, I have to go to college or what else am I going to do? (May, 2010)

Both his older brother and sister struggled with their transition, and their experience left Daniel thinking he had to do well in college. One of the ways he felt he could succeed was by staying home and avoiding the distraction of going away to college. He made the conscious decision to stay near home and commit himself to college, given that both his
older sister and brother went away and had a difficult time. His siblings’ struggles had a significant impact on what schools he felt he could apply to and his outlook on college. Though both of his siblings had a difficult time in college, this did not discourage Daniel. Daniel’s outlook on college was not only shaped by what he observed in his immediate family, but what he observed from his extended family as well.

As mentioned before, Daniel also had some aunts and cousins who attended college, but there were also members who did not attend college. Daniel witnessed their life experiences and felt as if a college degree was necessary for social mobility. He stated:

I feel it’s extremely important because half of my family, the family that I’ve seen that hasn’t attended college, they either haven’t gotten any jobs or do the same things their entire life without gaining a salary—they have minimum wage jobs. But people who have gone to college and gain degrees, they earn careers. (April, 2010)

Daniel makes the distinction between getting a job and having a career. He believes obtaining a college education is how you secure the latter. The members in his family who did not have careers and who maintained minimum wage jobs were the ones who did not have a college degree.

Daniel’s extensive family history at Lehman College created a unique situation for him among all the other participants. Daniel was able to utilize both his parents and sister as resources in his transition. All three had intimate information about the school and campus Daniel was going to attend, which created social and cultural capital for Daniel if he chose to activate them. Both Daniel’s mother and sister offered Daniel advice about Lehman. During some of the conversations Daniel had with his mother, she offered to show Daniel around the college and to introduce him to some people. As Daniel shared,
“she just said ‘if you want to go to Lehman, I can show you around or show you a few people I know from Lehman’” (May, 2010). Though Daniel’s mother offered him these resources, Daniel did not accept her offers. He felt more comfortable doing things on his own. Daniel’s sister also offered him some assistance, but her assistance consisted of more words of advice than anything else. She told Daniel:

    Just to make sure I don’t get stuck applying for classes late, for registering classes too late so I get something […] My sister gave me advice for that. It’s pretty much so I won’t get stuck last minute doing things. (May, 2010)

Daniel’s sister’s assistance came as words of advice, but it was valuable insider information. Registering for classes, especially at a CUNY school, can sometimes be frustrating for lower classmen. Students who are new to the registration process, are often unaware that as a freshman and sophomore, you have to register early. By telling Daniel to register early, his sister was trying to ensure he does not get stuck getting classes he doesn’t want, at undesirable times. She was also trying to ensure Daniel is not “locked” out of any classes he may potentially need. Having family members within his household with college experience was definitely a resource for Daniel, even though he did not recognize it at the time.

**The Gentle Ease of Kevin’s mom**

Because of his academic background as valedictorian, Kevin needed little prodding or convincing to go to college. Kevin aspired to go to college from early on. This was in part due to his high academic achievement which led to the constant support of his teachers. Kevin shared:

    My mom knows I’m going to college. She’s not the type to be like force me to do what I want. She wants me to choose what I want to do. She’s happy that I’m going to college. She’s happy that I’m graduating. I’m the valedictorian of my school! (April, 2010)
Kevin’s mom took a hands-off approach with him because she felt as he was going to be fine. Though Kevin felt as if his mom did not “force” him to do things he did not want to do, the expectations for Kevin were set early on. As Kevin recalled:

In a way, she pushed me, but she didn’t have to say anything because she already knew my goals were going to be fine from the very beginning since I was like in middle school or elementary school. She knew that. The only thing she told me was like, ‘Just don’t end up in the streets. Don’t hang out around here. Don’t hang out with people who are a bad influence.’ Little by little now I have a bunch of freedom in the house. She lets me hang out whenever I want. I always go to the city. I’m hardly ever in The Bronx. I go to Brooklyn, so... She just lets me do what I want because she knows I’m graduating. She sees my report card all the time and I’m always like A’s, straight A’s or sometimes B+ (April, 2010).

According to Kevin, his mother was more concerned with his safety and whom he was hanging out with, as opposed to his school-work. As Kevin got older, he felt as if his mother eased up on him, and allowed him more freedom. Kevin’s freedom was contingent on his academic progress and success. Kevin believed that his mother trusted him. From Kevin’s perspective his mother only became concerned when he struggled academically. Kevin said:

She already knows that I do good in school but when she sees for example a B and everything else is A, she will be like, ‘What’s wrong with you? Get that A. That’s what you got to do.’ I’ll be like, ‘Yes, yes, yes.’ [...] If I get a C she gets kind of mad because she expects me to do very good. She gets mad. (May, 2010)

Kevin’s mother expects the best from him so when he brings grades home which don’t reflect his capabilities, she gets mad. These instances are the only times where Kevin’s mom becomes concerned and intervenes in his progress. Besides these rare moments, Kevin felt as if there was no need for his mother to get involved.

Kevin’s mom did become more involved and offered advice during the college choice process. Kevin’s mother was well aware that Kevin wanted to stay in the city and
he shared how his mom:

was trying to tell me go to New York University, NYU, since I want to stay. I
don’t know. She was just like giving me a little bit of advice but she doesn’t really
know that much because she hasn’t gone through it. She was just giving me some
suggestions on colleges. (April, 2010)

Though Kevin’s mother never interfered with Kevin’s academic progress, she did take it
upon herself to provide some insight on college she thought he should apply to. Kevin
was hesitant to take his mother’s advice because she never went through the college
process. Kevin did not identify her suggestions and advice as a resource, because he felt
she could not relate to the process and what he was going through. Despite this, Kevin
did rely on his mother for emotional support during the transition.

Kevin became overwhelmed with the process and was concerned about his
transition to college. His mother was there to ease his anxiety and calm him down. He
discussed his anxiety with his mother who was able to provide some suggestions and
advice. As Kevin shared:

I took like some of her advice and suggestions. She just told me to calm down
because like during the journey I was stressing out about college. I was like I
don’t know where I’m going to go, but then senior year came and it was easier
than I thought. She helped me out, and my aunt helped me out too because she
knows some colleges and she found out some scholarship things and let me apply
to them. She told my mom about it and let me apply to them. (April, 2010)

His mother recruited his aunt to help out with Kevin’s financial aid since she had a
deeper understanding. By activating his social capital through his mom, Kevin was able
to apply for some scholarships, and became more at ease with the process. Kevin’s mom,
for the most part, played a minimal role in Kevin’s college transition, except for those
times where she felt she need to intervene or when Kevin approached her for assistance.
Conclusion

For the most part students did not report too many barriers created by their families, but neither were all their families important resources. Potential barriers manifested themselves as minor impediments rather than actual barriers. Students discussed in great length how their birth order played a role in creating these potential barriers. Depending on their birth order in their respective families came expectations. For the older students, like Kevin, Diego, and David, their position amongst their siblings brought with them an extra pressure to do well. They were seen as trailblazers who were expected to set a good example for the rest of their siblings. Their accomplishments in college and in life in general, would set benchmarks for their younger siblings. These pressures and expectations were placed upon them by their families, more specifically their mothers and fathers. Also in being the oldest, they were allowed less leeway in their decision-making and were held to higher standards than their younger siblings. Despite these expectations, they were steadfast in going to college and did not feel as if their families were barriers in their progress.

In Manolo’s case, his distant and un-compassionate relationship with his immediate family created a unique dynamic in the study. According to Manolo, his family was not supportive of him throughout his youth so he felt as if all his accomplishments were his to celebrate. He took great pride in his achievements and became concerned and upset when his family celebrated his college success. Manolo’s family was unable to provide him with the social nor cultural capital needed to transition to college. This was due to the fact that he was the first in the family to go to college. In addition, Manolo expressed how his family never took an interest in him, his schooling or
accomplishments prior to his college acceptance. Even if they did possess cultural or social capital, Manolo’s family dynamic didn’t seem to warrant the activations or transmission of capital. Despite this unique family dynamic, Manolo was able to resist these barriers. This speaks to strength of Manolo’s college habitus, and how it was able to motivate him to achieve, despite his circumstances. Unfortunately this was not the case for Nelson.

Nelson articulated how his relationship with his mother created an impediment in his desire to transition to college. Nelson illustrated how he was never urged to think of college as an option, and felt if he had these conversations with his mother he may have considered attending college. Nelson believed his mother was only concerned with his immediate passions and since that was music, she supported him in trying to become a performer. Though this may have been the case, Nelson was never really forthright with his mother concerning his academic performance. His mother was under the impression he was doing fine in school and when she was notified of the contrary, she became concerned and tried to motivate him to do better. Nelson perceived her concern for his academic progress as too late to help, and wished she would have been more involved earlier in his academic career. Nelson’s mother was also in a situation where she could not provide much cultural capital nor social capital in his transition, but what she lacked in capital she made up in love and support for Nelson, especially when he needed her the most.

Participants discussed how their nuclear, and extended families played a role in shaping their college habitus. Whether it was taking a hands-off approach, providing words of encouragement, setting expectations, providing insider information, or strong
support from family, students discussed these interactions and its impact. Though many family members did not attend nor graduate from college, they were able to provide several forms of capital. In Bourdieu’s social practice construct, the knowledge of college is usually associated most with cultural capital. Family members were able to instill in the participants the importance of college, but fell short of providing the deep knowledge of the workings of college, cultural capital, because they lacked experience with college. Though they may not have instilled the necessary cultural capital needed to survive in college, they were able to instill in them other forms of capital not captured in Bourdieu’s cultural capital construct.

In her work Yosso (2005) identifies other forms of capital not captured by traditional cultural capital conversations. Her identification of an additional six forms of capital, possessed and utilized by many students of color, help to explain how family members in this study were able to provide resources to the participants. Yosso’s (2005) construct of community cultural wealth identifies capital in the form of Aspirational Capital; Familial Capital; Linguistic Capital; Navigational Capital; Resistant Capital; and Social Capital. During the interaction with family members, students were able to utilize and activate aspirational capital as identified by Yosso.

Students often discussed how their family members instilled in them what Yosso would describe as aspirational capital, the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future. By instilling in them the importance and expectation of going to college and continually having discussions with students during their transition, family members were able to keep alive the dream of attending college during difficult times. This aspirational capital helped to shape the students’ college habitus, and often students
recalled these words of encouragement when anxiety mounted. Family members instilled in students the expectation of going to college, and often followed up with them ensuring the transition was a reality.

During their college transition, students often found themselves negotiating many fields, some of which did not have the most encouraging messages about their college transition. Students also had to deal with family members who were not too supportive in the process. By activating their aspirational capital, students were able to continue to make progress towards college guided by their college going habitus. This capital was crucial for many during this transition.

Another factor which emerged was the impact of all of the participants’ mothers. Mothers were the ones who instilled the aspirational capital in all the participants and were the ones who they could count on the most. Whenever the participants discussed they were down or feeling uneasy about the transition, their mothers were there to help enliven their spirits and convince them to keep going. The mothers were also the ones that instilled in the participants the need to go to college and who set the expectations that they would not accept anything less. Mothers were the initiators of capital and the genesis of the college going capital.
Chapter Seven

School

The participants in the study discussed how their individual schools played a role in their college transition decision. The school, within Bourdieu’s theory of practice would be defined as another field or social structure, where students struggle to obtain various forms of capital. In this field students are exposed to social and cultural capital and have the opportunity to build and activate them. Schools also mold and shape the students’ dispositions, or habitus, specifically in this case concerning college. Many of the participants discussed the role their respective schools played in motivating them or not in wanting to attend college. Students talked both positively and negatively about their schools and the role they played in their college transition.

All the schools transmitted various messages about college, and the students interpreted the messages depending on their disposition and evolving habitus toward college and whether or not they felt that the institutionalized cultural capital in the form of a college degree played a significant role in their life journeys. Students spoke of how the messages obtained from the field of school played both the role of barriers and facilitators in their college transition. Students articulated two messages about the relationship of their school experience to the college transition:

1) Schools pushed them to graduate, but did not prepare them for college,

2) Masculinity played an important part in how they were treated in school.

This chapter will address those messages.
Familiarization with College without College Preparation: Daniel and Nelson’s journey

*Pushed to graduation in an all-male school: Daniel’s Story*

Out of all the students, Daniel was the most vocal and outspoken in discussing the role his school played in shaping his view about college. Daniel was the only student who attended an all-boys public high school in the study, Alas Academy. Some of his discontent came from attending an all-male school, but more specifically he was discontented with the messages the school conveyed to their students.

After spending the last four years in an all-boys school, Daniel had some major critiques of the school and its process. He talked about the meaning of going to a single-sex school Daniel stated:

> The purpose of going to all-male school is separation from the distractions of the female sex and all that crap. I don’t know, it just separates you from bad distractions, but it doesn’t prepare you for the real world because in the real world you are in coed everyday. So, it’s different; it’s a real different experience. (April, 2010)

Daniel articulates the advantages of attending a single sex school, but he also expresses, from his perspective, the disadvantages. One disadvantage is that it hasn’t prepared him to function in a “real world” context by separating him from the opposite sex. Daniel constantly talked about his dissatisfaction with his school, but also recognized the role it played in shaping who he is.

One of the messages Daniel’s school conveyed were values. He states:

> Our school teaches you like how to dress properly, teach you how to respect females and how to be a man, supposedly. They teach like those morals. If you follow them, it’s your choice, but the majority will stick to you. At the same time, all the things that we do in our classroom eventually those will stick also (April, 2010).
His school makes an overt effort to mold a disposition of what it means to be a “man” through their daily practices. For the most part, Daniel believes students exercise agency about whether or not they want to embody some of these characteristics. To Daniel, it’s a choice of whether to uphold and “live” by these standards. Some students may abide by these messages of manhood and act them out on a daily basis and others will not. Daniel contends:

> It depends on the person because these people in my school who take education very seriously, like they somehow avoid all the distractions and they stick to the work. But the majority of people just, they might be like that after the first year, but by senior year, they fall into the environment. (April, 2010)

According to Daniel, these messages have a short shelf life with the majority of his classmates. Daniel believes that the majority of the students in the school buy into the messages/dispositions of “manhood” the school attempts to create for the first couple of years, but by the time they reach senior year their dispositions have changed. Daniel discusses a dichotomy which exists in his school. One are the values that the school tries to instill in the student body, and another the practices which exist amongst the students.

He provides an example of how this dichotomy plays out with one of his fellow classmates during his time at the school:

> There’s this kid that came in to our school, never cursed a day in his life, never disrespected the teacher or anything, never talk out of his mouth. By senior year, he was doing the same things that everybody else was doing. First year, he was fine. He was himself. Senior year, he is still himself more, you can tell that the school has influenced him. (April, 2010)

For Daniel, it is inevitable that you will become a victim of the “school environment”. This plays out in the form of disrespect, talking back and cursing, all of which went against the school code or disposition the school tried to instill.
Daniel believed this dichotomy existed in his school because it was not a coed environment:

I’m saying in my school, on a regular day, you go in and play because everybody is joking around all day, especially with a female teacher, everybody is joking and playful, you can say one thing and the whole class goes off. It’s more like, I don’t know how you describe it. Basically, it’s a very different environment. Say in coed school, okay, you joke around but not to the extreme that we do. (April, 2010)

Daniel believes that the students in his single-sex school, especially the older students, are more interested in joking around than being “serious”. This joking around was viewed positively, almost as a form of capital which all the male students exercised. The particular student to whom Daniel referred to before, in an attempt to fit in with all his peers, began to behave in a way which was in total contradiction to what he did his first couple of years. The acting out, cursing, and being disrespectful were all behaviors exhibited by many of the students in an attempt to garner an acceptance amongst the student body.

Though the school attempted to shape a different disposition amongst the students, one of respect and high morals in relation to manhood, for the majority of students this type of disposition and capital was not something they viewed in high regard. Though Daniel himself bought into this type of behavior, he also viewed the disposition of joking around and disrespect as worrisome in a school environment. The transition from being a student who takes school seriously to a student who jokes and is less concerned with school happens over a gradual period of time, but from Daniel’s perspective it is something that inevitably happens.

Daniel also shares the school’s messages about college:
Ninth grade is when they hit us hard with trying to prep us for college, but after ninth grade is pretty much like they are just trying to push us to finish. They’re trying to get everybody to have enough credits to finish. (April, 2010)

From Daniel’s perspective, ninth grade is when both students and school personnel are most aligned with a commitment to the importance of transition to college. But once the students have been at the school for a while, the personnel is more interested in just getting the students to finish high school. According to Daniel, the school was committed to preparing the students to “pretty much go off to college, but they’re not preparing us for college” (April, 2010). Daniel, throughout his interviews, was very persistent about this fact. He felt as if his school fell short in preparing its students to succeed in college. Daniel believed the “goal of the school is to prepare us for college, they’ve done that. They’ve prepared us to get into college” (April, 2010).

To Daniel, Alas Academy did a good job introducing him to the importance of a college education. Daniel talks about the constant messages Alas Academy transmits about going to college, the importance of a college education, and how it is the next step in their development: “They even try to stress college on everybody for the last four years, but they haven’t really prepared us for college” (April, 2010).

Daniel was adamant about the lack of preparation by the school in instilling the tools and dispositions which would equate into college success. He stated: “They’re helping us apply to college, they are prepping us to gain interest in college, but once you get into college for the most instance you’re going to be stuck” (May, 2010). Though Daniel does not know this for a fact, since he has yet to make the actual transition to college, his basis for this accusation was what he has experienced. He expands upon the lack of preparation for college:
Like the topics that we do in class. For the whole first semester we were going over basic writing stuff, like basic poetry or like haikus and different types of poetry. We’ve gone over a few different styles of writing, but I don’t believe personally this has been preparatory (April, 2010).

Daniel believes the coursework he has received thus far has not been preparatory and will not benefit him once he makes the actual transition. He perceives this work as basic, and not college-level work. For Daniel, this is all a ploy by the school. If the school provides basic work which will help them graduate high school, the school can continue to enjoy a good public appearance with high graduation and college acceptance rates. Daniel states: “Personally, I think it’s so that after you get into college and after you graduate, so that it looks good for them because whatever accomplishments you gain, looks good on the school also” (May, 2010). Daniel felt the school had an image to maintain and this image went counter to the message on which the school built its reputation.

Daniel was the most outspoken student concerning his schools’ impact in preparing and fostering a college-based culture. Other students discussed the schools’ impact, but to a lesser extent.

*Graduation, but not preparation: Nelson’s View*

Nelson had similar views about how his school was not preparing him to make the transition. Like Daniel, Nelson felt as if certain subject teachers were just concerned with providing enough work and information for students to graduate. For Nelson, some teachers were only concerned about the immediate educational situation of the students and were not looking beyond that in providing information or assistance. Nelson states:

Like English teachers and History teachers, I feel like they’re more concentrating in getting you the credits so you can go; but like the Dean or the School Principal, College Advisers, the counselor, I feel, like they try hard. They’re always like, ‘Look man, college is going to help you with this. It’s going to help you do that.
It’s going to make you.’ (April, 2010)

In Nelson’s case, he specifically identifies what he has experienced in his English and music classes as specific instances where he felt the teachers could have provided more assistance than just what is required to pass the class. He felt as if those teachers did not prepare him for college.

Nelson felt as if some people in the school, mainly administrators and counselors had more to share about the college transition and the importance of going to college than the teachers. Nelson elaborated on this difference by saying:

I feel the teachers like music or English class they’re more concentrating on giving you the credits so you can actually make it to college. Whereas the Counselor he’s the one that’s telling you like, ‘Look this is what college is going to do for you. I know that we’re always talking about it, but there’s a reason why and this is why, A B C.’ (April, 2010)

Though Nelson felt the majority of teachers at his school were preoccupied with just getting students to graduate, he did feel as if his counselor was willing to share that information. Many of the students discussed being male in school. This is the subject of the next sub-section.

**Being Male in School from multiple perspectives**

**Being male in a closing school: Manolo’s story**

In Manolo’s instance, his school played a huge role in shaping a college habitus. Since his school was to be closed by the NYC Department of Education the year after his class graduated, most of the teachers and staff could not allocate as much time as they wanted to help the students with their transition to college. Their attention was elsewhere, in an attempt to save the school from closure.

With a graduating class of only 19, Manolo recalls that not even half the class was
male. He, like many of the students, pointed to how males were treated differently in school by their teachers. Though he felt as if teachers treated him differently because he was a male, he had no direct evidence concerning this gender bias. He states:

I haven't seen like any direct evidence that I'm treated differently than any other girl in the classes, but I'm pretty sure that in the back of a teacher's mind it's like 'males are less likely to graduate according to statistics so let me help this one out because he's actually doing what he's supposed to do'. I think that was a positive side of it. But I think there was one teacher that used that against me. This woman, I cannot stand her. She's a retired lawyer which she puts in your face about, and she was a real, real...can I curse? Bitch. That's who she was. I couldn't stand her. She made sure... like her classroom is hell. She actually made you...like you're not allowed to cross your arms inside the classroom. (April, 2010)

Manolo was one of the few males actually doing well at his school, but he felt he was targeted by this female teacher because he was a male. He went on to describe how this teacher wouldn’t pick on everyone in his class, but would single him out many times:

She will get on me because I... like it was funny because she likes attention or something and when you don't give it to her, she gets pretty angry. I would purposely neglect that attention from her. I just stood there looking really serious, while she went about her day. She didn't think I was listening, but I always was, and she will always like... all the questions were directed at me and I was answering correctly which made her even more mad. It’s like she tried and she failed me in this project that we had in school. (April, 2010)

Though this teacher gave him a failing grade for the project, which was part of a portfolio-based project he needed to graduate, the administrators at his school reversed his grade which allowed him to graduate because he was an outstanding male student in the school. This interaction between the teacher and Manolo could have been a barrier to his eventual transition to college, but luckily for him, the school stepped in and made sure this teacher did not impede his progress.
Gender and smartness: Diego’s views on teachers’ preferences

Diego felt as if his female teachers had a clear preference for the female students and would be willing to assist them more in times of need or in providing information. He said: “I don’t know about male teachers, but I know woman teachers have preferences to girls” (April, 2010). Diego went on to provide details on how he saw this materializing on a daily basis by the way people were categorized as smart or un-smart in the school based upon gender. Diego states:

I don’t know, it’s just what I see. I don’t know why it is, but I guess it’s with the gender, but definitely with the smartness, like if a student is established in school and they are known as smart and then the teacher, I have seen the teachers give them extra help, and I get pissed off. Teachers always say they don’t have favorites, but they do. (April, 2010)

Diego illustrates his frustration with the teaching practices of some teachers and how they play favorites, based on “smartness,” gender, and the students’ established reputation in the school. Diego has personally witnessed teachers providing extra help and giving other students leeway. He states:

I think the teacher kind of like, with the smart and not smart thing, it’s because if you’re not smart and you try your hardest to do as well as you can, they’ll just give you a grade, but they won’t give you that extra help. It’s hard to explain. (April, 2010)

For Diego it was hard to articulate what he was witnessing and experiencing on a daily basis, but it was clear that there was a difference in the way teachers treated students based both on gender and how students were perceived intellectually. Diego went on to explain that in his school, more girls are considered smarter than boys, and because of this, they were given the benefit of the doubt when it came to grades and passing classes.
Being male in an all-boys school: Daniel

As Daniel pointed out at the beginning of this section, young males approached education differently than females. Though Daniel attended an all-male school, he felt as if young men are “more playful, joking, like not as serious like, say as coed environments I believe because everybody says you’re with your friends all the time, you’re ‘all brothers.’ I don’t know, it’s more playful” (April, 2010). Daniel conveys that being in an all-male school played a role in the students’ interaction with each other, as well as with the staff at the school. He emphasized this by stating “I think we approach education differently, because say, all girls’ school, I don’t want to generalize, but I believe they take education more seriously than in all boys’ school” (April, 2010). For Daniel there was a correlation between the gender make-up of the school and the way the students at his school approached education.

David and male clowns

David also expressed how young men behave differently in the classroom and are perceived to care less about their education. David states “The clowns of the class are usually men because they are considered the ones who go to school and do nothing…and the ladies are the good girls of the school and the good students” (April, 2010). Even though David attends a co-ed school, his observation about gender roles and behaviors supports Daniel’s assumption described earlier. The males at David’s school don’t take their schooling seriously and are perceived and expected to behave as class clowns, as opposed to female students who are the “good” students.

Males don’t care and teachers don’t care for males: Kevin’s views

Kevin, who attends the same school as David supports David’s claim that young
men approach education differently than their female counterparts. He states:

The girls even if they didn’t take education that seriously, but they did what they had to do or at least say ‘I’m going to college regardless’, went. But the boys, there were some boys that didn’t care and didn’t want to go. I don’t know why. I don’t know any reason but they would slack off. More boys would slack off. (April, 2010)

In Kevin’s analysis, the young men he observed in his school would slack off more than the females and for the most part would not attend college. As for the females, all they needed to do was aspire to go to college, and more often than not they would make the transition. Kevin provides an explanation as to why he believes there is “slacking off” or lack of interest in his school among some of his male peers. He states that young men at his school were treated differently as opposed to the young women because teachers:

Care more about the girls. They wouldn’t confront them negatively or get annoyed by them easily. But if guys confronted them a certain way, they would just get angry, just ignore them or whatever […] If a student asks for help, the teacher will help, but mostly likely they care more about girls. (April, 2010)

Similar to what Diego had expressed earlier with its observations, young men and women are treated differently at their respective schools. In Diego’s case, the young women were automatically thought of as being the smart ones in the classroom or were given the benefit of the doubt when it came to their grades. Kevin also believed the teachers cared more about the girls and would give them more “leeway” when young women expressed their frustrations. For the young men, the teachers would ignore them, and get easily annoyed. The girls, even if they acted out, were still provided with assistance which led to more opportunities to succeed. Kevin continued to discuss gender dynamics at his school with teachers:
The boys will have to seek, like some of my friends or some people that I know, for more help. But as for the girls, they would just confront them maybe. Some girls slack off and they don’t care. They [teachers] would confront them and be like, ‘You have to do this and that.’ Usually they announce it to the whole class, but I think they confront the girls more. (April, 2010)

Kevin is commenting on how the teachers make assumptions about some students based upon their gender and how this impacts students. Kevin believes many of the teachers already have an assumption about whether or not some of the boys will apply themselves to doing their work. These assumptions dictate how the teachers interact with the students. Kevin also describes how the teachers are more willing to confront female students when they are “slacking” or under performing. The teachers go out of their way to make sure the female students engage more within school and change their ways. Kevin had observed in the past how some teachers would personally seek out some female students to make sure they are performing at a higher level. Also, Kevin has observed teachers make announcement to an entire class about their under performance, but he felt as if that message was really focused towards the female students in the class.

**Teachers don’t like guys: Marvin**

When asked if teachers had favorites, Marvin expressed some of the same sentiments expressed earlier by some of the students. He stated:

Well, there is some. I guess I would say there are some teachers that play favorites, and there are some teachers that they don’t say it upfront and….There’s one teacher in my school that all the guys think she doesn’t like guys, like she’s one of those, ‘I hate guys ’cause I was hurt in the past’ or something. (April, 2010)

Again, Marvin illustrates how he perceives males are singled out because of their gender. Though his rationale may not be accurate, as it comes off as a bit sexist, these are
discussions he had with his peers. This lack of acceptance from this particular teacher, as well as others who played favorites meant that Marvin could not go to these teachers for help.

The views of Manolo, Diego, Daniel, David, Kevin and Marvin illustrated above show how these young men became conscious of the gender dynamics at their respective schools and how gender roles were being constructed. Students discussed an evolution which took place from freshman year to senior year, and how the expectations among their peers changed. In the beginning it was more socially accepted among their peers to be an “obedient” student, to follow the schools codes and to be studious, but as they advanced the attitudes and expectation began to shift. Their peers would be less engaged with the school and they would have a tendency to express themselves through joking around and “slacking off”. This was not only expected behavior amongst peers, but the teachers contributed to the construction of this habitus by having different expectations for the males as opposed to the females. The females were seen as smart, good and were given more opportunities, as opposed to the young men who felt they were expected to act out, not be as smart or engaged, and were given less opportunity. Many of the students also expressed how many teachers played favorites with students, and many of the teachers’ favorites were girls.

**Conclusion**

The students all talked about the role of the schools in their college transition. Though the school did not offer impediments in their transition, they did acknowledge the barriers they held. The barriers identified were:
1) not being provided with content knowledge for college;

2) dealing with a culture in school where males were perceived as less engaged or as clowns and treating them differently from females.

Despite these micro-barriers, students were able to navigate them. This did not impede their eventual goal of going to college. But for some of their peers, who were not part of this study, there may have been a negative impact on their college-going habitus. For students who may be undecided about schooling and college, these micro-barriers may have an adverse effect on them and may contribute to a habitus which views college as more of the same unequal treatment as males that they have experienced in high school.

Continuing with the topic of school, the next chapter considers the ways in which school as an institution makes a difference to individual students. We consider the resources and barriers students find in four schools — two with three students each, one with two students, and one school which only one student attended.
Chapter Eight

The effect of schools

Some of the students in the study attended the same schools. Three were enrolled at Singer high school, three were enrolled at Health Academy, and two attended Poet High School. Despite attending the same schools students accessed and navigated the school’s barriers and resources differently. The ways in which the students felt supported or not through the college transition process had little to do with the school itself. Even though the students attended the same schools, they all possessed and were able to activate various forms of capital. That is, even though they might potentially have the same school resources, the students do not access them in the same way.

The above mentioned schools will be highlighted in this chapter since they were the schools which shared participants. In the final section of this chapter I will discuss Manolo’s reality at his school which was the only school closing during and after the time of data collection. We start by considering what happens to students who attend the same school but discussed different lived experiences.

Same School, Different Realities

Students accessed teachers and resources differently, experienced various different barriers and were sometimes unaware of the resources provided by the school. This chapter of the dissertation will discuss how students who attended the same school experienced different transitional processes.

Health Academy: Shallow but differential role

For the three students who attended Health Academy — Pablo, Antonio and Diego -- their perception of school personnel and teachers as a resource varied. We will
review each students’ case below.

Pablo discussed how not only was his counselor pivotal in helping him choose and apply to schools, but he didn’t recall any teachers turning him down for assistance. While discussing who helped him to complete his college applications Pablo shared how he had “counselors and teachers that have come to me and asked me if I need any help [....] There is no one that hasn't said not to go. All of them have said to go” (April, 2010). Pablo, unlike some of the students in the study which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 9, was a bit more fortunate because he felt almost everyone at his school volunteered some of their services to help him with the transition process. From words of encouragement to offering to read over some of his college essays, Pablo could not recall anyone not willing to help him or offering some sort of assistance. Pablo continued to share how teachers and school personnel would frequently stop him in the hall to make sure he was getting his college applications done and on time. Pablo stated:

Yes, pretty much. When I see them [teachers and school personnel] in the hallway they would say, ‘Oh, Pablo, are you getting yourself into college?’’ When teachers would see a group of us, the teacher asks, “How you guys doing?” and start talking about college somehow. (April, 2010)

From Pablo’s perspective, the teachers and school personnel were actively involved in discussing college and expectations with the students. Teachers would frequently ask not only Pablo, but other students at the school how their college applications were coming along and if they needed assistance. Teachers would also take it upon themselves to initiate conversations with students concerning college when they saw a group of students congregating together. Pablo also discussed in more detail how teachers would assist students with the college transition process and share information about academic
survival. According to Pablo:

There were some [teachers] that had talked about it, about how they have teachers [professors] that are boring. There's also some that have roamed over to tell us stories that happens -- what to watch out for, stuff like that. Take notes, to practice taking notes. Listen to them and just take notes. Get into class on time and go into class, no fooling around and having parties the day before the test, and something like that. (April, 2010)

In the above quote Pablo illustrates how teachers would share brief personal encounters they had while in college. Teachers would discuss boring, or uninteresting professors they had, as well as classes. They also offered advice, but the advice they offered was very mechanical, like ‘Get to class on time,’ ‘Don’t fool around and don’t party the day before an exam.’ This advice is not going to help students if they need to challenge a professor or advocate on their behalf.

Pablo also received advice from personnel at his school when it came down to choosing which college he should attend. Though Pablo shared how he made the decision on his own to attend City College, he did go to his college advisor for some last minute input. Pablo mentioned how his:

    guidance counselor told me it was a good school, it's close to home, it's not that much of a change, it's not a drastic change and things like that. She told me that City was like a university; it’s the same thing as going upstate; it's just in the city. (May, 2010)

Pablo wanted to make sure he was going to enroll in a school where he could survive and persist. In getting the vote of confidence from his advisor that City would be a good fit for him, Pablo decided to enroll there. Though Pablo did make the final decision, the reassurance from his advisor that City was not that much of a drastic change from what he was used to at Health Academy made Pablo’s decision easier.

    Antonio’s recollection of the assistance he received at his school was on par with
Pablo’s, but was slightly different. Like Pablo, Antonio felt as if his college advisor was helpful throughout the process. Antonio shared how his college advisor was hands-on with his transition until the end when she felt as if he should develop some autonomy. As Antonio shared:

She did offer to help and then towards the end she realized—she didn’t realize but she pretty much told us, “Now, since it’s getting in your hands, so you got to make sure you’ll be on top of everything financially, grants, loans, scholarships, things like that.” (April, 2010)

Antonio’s counselor was there to help out and offer assistance, but also wanted to make sure that he and the other students did not depend on her too much. She wanted to make sure they would be able to accomplish things on their own. So as the end of the school year neared, she encouraged them to work on their own on such things as financial aid. Though she did not totally turn her back on them, she did encourage them to figure out the process on their own and to search for outside funding. Even though Antonio’s interaction with the college advisor was similar to Pablo’s, Antonio did not feel as if the teachers at his school were as welcoming with information as Pablo suggested. As Antonio illustrated:

I don’t really think they say it directly, to go to college. But there are a few messages here and there like say, I’ve had some classes where it be like me and two of my other friends will be the only two or three seniors in there and then most of the class will be like sophomores or juniors—just in case that they need a credit or something. But we're just taking the class as an elective and every now and then you would hear the teacher will be tremble off and talk about college and will be like, “Oh you need to do this, because college is coming up around the corner,” things like that. (April, 2010)

In Antonio’s example, teachers discussed college in passing as opposed to sharing or suggesting information. Antonio does not discuss any instances where teachers frequently pulled him over and discussed the college transition or offered help with the process. In
Antonio’s illustration, teachers discussed the mechanical and technical side of college survival. Though Antonio’s recollection of teacher assistance was not as extensive as Pablo’s, Antonio did recall one teacher whose advice made an impression on him. In discussing if he felt as if teachers at his school offered college advice without solicitation, Antonio began to recall one instance where it did take place: “Except for one teacher that I didn’t even ask but he told me about it after asking if I had applied and things like that, then he shared his experience” (April, 2010).

Antonio’s response differed from Pablo’s as he felt many teachers did not publicly discuss college without solicitation from students. Antonio felt as if teachers had to be approached on a personal basis in order for the conversations to begin. Antonio did acknowledge that he felt comfortable that teachers would not turn students away if approached, but students may not feel comfortable enough to approach teachers to initiate these types of conversation. In Antonio’s circumstance there was only one teacher which Antonio recalled initiating the conversation. According to Antonio, the teacher’s conversations about college went beyond the technical and mechanical aspects of the transition. His conversations went a lot deeper and Antonio appreciated the knowledge this teacher shared with him. As Antonio shared, this particular teacher:

> talked about his experience. Basically, like what I said before about the focus and everything. Sometimes he would slack off and he would find himself scrambling to make stuff up, like putting the work back in that he didn’t put in before—so things like that. (April, 2010)

In his conversations with Antonio, this teacher shared openly the struggles he had as a college student and how some of the initial strategies he used in college failed. This caused this teacher to work hard to try and complete assignments, often finding himself having to make up work. The conversations with Antonio went beyond the mechanical
aspects and included the pitfalls of not doing well in college by adding his personal story of struggle, failure and success. As Antonio shared:

He did tell me how serious the professors are and stuff like that. Like in high school you can beg the teacher or try to “talk to teachers and tell them I have other classes or the papers and stuff like that, can I make up this and this and this another time?” [In High School] They’re like, “Yes, I’ll give you next week or two days or tomorrow.” Then he told me, in college it just won’t work like that at all, so that’s some information I got. (April, 2010)

This story was presented as a warning to Antonio about the pitfalls of college, but it helped Antonio see that many other students have struggled with the transition. Antonio’s teacher was able to express the difference between high school teachers and college professors concerning the submission of assignments. Though this illustration did have an impact on Antonio concerning the difference between high school and college, I would contest that this example is not always correct. Many college professors do grant extensions on papers, depending on the circumstance. Though I do not agree with some of the content of the stories, Antonio’s teacher was able to have a continual positive impact on him by further illustrating the difference between high school and college through stories. Antonio continued to share:

He just told me about the work ethic and how it is. He told me about some kind of racist thing that he thought was going on in his college […] I don’t exactly remember the situation, but I know he told me something about it—something about racist or something like that. (April, 2010)

This teacher not only made it a point to discuss his personal struggles with the college transition, but also discussed how he experienced overt racism at his school. This was the first time any teacher or school personnel discussed race or race relations at their school, which I found significant since college is where students will most likely experience overt racism. The stories shared with Antonio by his teachers were a resource in his
transition. These were stories he could relate to and was able to receive valuable information about college life, which went beyond mechanical warnings and advice concerning behavior.

These stories were the only forms of advice which Antonio recalled getting from teachers, which was contrary to Pablo’s experience with teachers at Health Academy. Pablo recalled having many teachers offer advice and assistance with the transition, much of which was unsolicited, whereas Antonio felt many teachers did not share much information unless they were asked.

Diego, the other participant in the study who attended Health Academy, shared his own experience with teachers and school personnel. Diego’s recollection was not as detailed as Antonio’s or Pablo’s. He only recalled sparse conversations or words of advice provided by staff at his high school. In Diego’s experience, he only remembered teachers stating obvious words of encouragement to students where they shared:

- make sure you go. Make sure you apply. They do that once in a while […] Some of them will say the same thing like you need to go, make sure you go to college and make sure you graduate and stuff” (April, 2010).

Like Antonio, Diego felt the teachers just provided superficial words of encouragement. Teachers did not go beyond the basics with their advice, and Diego’s recollection supplied less information than Antonio’s. Like Antonio, Diego felt as if there was one teacher who did go beyond the norm at the school and provided some more details concerning college. This teacher provided personal stories about college. Though Diego did not recall all the conversations the teacher had with his classes, he did recall some words of advice the teacher provided. Diego mentions how this teacher was “like, ‘Make sure you do want it, you know what you want to do, and make sure go through it. It
doesn’t matter where you go.’ He said, ‘Go to the college you want to.’ I remember that. I don’t remember everything he said” (April, 2010). This teacher’s words of advice were to attend the college of choice. He also shared with the students that it didn’t matter what school they attended, as long as they went to the school they wanted to attend. Though these words of advice may be powerful for students who are not likely to go to the most prestigious colleges in the country, I would have to disagree for the most part. If you want to become a classroom teacher, then the school you attend may not have any real effect on your future. But as I often tell my students, there is a vast difference between Hostos Community College and Harvard University. The expectation of each school is different, the type of job you may eventually get is going to be different, and the world’s expectation of you is going to be different. So even though these words of advice are helpful to students, the majority of whom will not be able to attend Harvard, and are encouraging to get students to think about college, masking it as if it didn’t matter what school you attend is not the truth. Diego reported that his interaction with teachers and staff did not go much further than these conversations and did not have as big an impact as Antonio’s or Pablo’s.

Poet High School

David and Kevin attended the same school, Poet High School. Yet, like the three students at Health Academy, David and Kevin had very different experiences when it came to the college application and transition process.

David discussed how he received assistance from various people at his school and both the parent coordinator and guidance counselor were most influential during his process. David was unique because he was the only student in the study to mention the
school parent coordinator as a resource during his transition. When asked who helped you
during the college application process. David shared how both his “mom, the parent
counselor at the school. She [parent coordinator] usually spoke to me. She spoke to me
and told me many options and stuff” (April, 2010). David later shared he was in contact
with the parent coordinator at his school because of the relationship she had with his
mother. This relation was unique to the study, or at least a relationship none of the other
students were aware of or worthy enough to mention. Though the parent coordinator was
helpful in David’s transition, the person at his school who had the most influence in his
transition was his guidance counselor. David viewed his guidance counselor as a valid
resource he could go to for assistance and insight about the college transition and college
life. As David shared:

> my guidance counselor always used to tell me that… I always used to tell her how
> many of these application I have and stuff and she always used to tell me that
> when you go to college and you will have to do things by yourself so you have to
> learn from them so basically, they give me a hint of what was college life. (April,
> 2010)

David’s guidance counselor was someone he felt comfortable confiding in and
approaching for assistance. His counselor was always there for him and answered all of
his questions. She reinforced college as an environment built on individualism and an
institutional setting which would not provide assistance to him when needed. Like others
in the study, David shared how his interactions with other school personnel concerning
his transition was brief and were encounters which provided superficial advice. In
discussing these interactions David shared how:

> a lot of the staff in the school, a lot of people I know, they told me to go to

---

7 This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.
college. It will never be easy but I can make it […] They usually talk about social experiences. Some of my teachers, they talk about their friends, some others, their social activities in college, and other ones they just give me advise, how I have to deal with it and do good in college. (April, 2010)

Like the other participants, David shared how school personnel just provided generic advice to go to college. David felt as if these words of advice were helpful in fueling his aspirations to go to college, but when probed to provide deeper insight he received from the school, David had a difficult time recalling specific advice.

Kevin shared in detail all of the advice he received from school personnel. Like David, Kevin utilized and viewed his guidance counselor as a resource during his transition. Kevin and his counselor worked extensively together to narrow down the potential schools he would apply to. In discussing the application process, Kevin gave all the credit to his counselor for helping him through the process. Kevin shared:

I've applied to college. Thanks to my guidance counselor. She helped me a lot […] I started with the CUNY’s. I applied to Lehman, Hunter, City College and Baruch. Then my guidance counselor suggested to put two community colleges just in case. It will be FCC and some other college in Queens. (April, 2010)

During the application process, Kevin specially recalled how his guidance counselor walked him through the process and suggested that he apply to community colleges “just in case” everything else did not work out. Kevin took his counselor’s advice and prior to submitting his college application, added two CUNY community colleges. Kevin’s guidance counselor not only walked him through the application process for CUNY and SUNY, she was also very influential in helping him to decide what private colleges he should apply to. As Kevin shared:

My guidance counselor helped me a lot. My adviser in school helped me. They helped me because private [school] I had no idea what to choose. SUNY’s, all I chose was New Paltz. From private, all I chose was Fordham University. They were telling me to choose Iona. “You want to stay and be in the State so choose
Iona or any other school” […] My guidance counselor suggested Saint Rose to me. She really liked that I kind of liked the school. My last two choices were that and Lehman. She just told me the application process was free. She was like, “Just go ahead and do it” whatever. (May, 2010)

Kevin really relied on and viewed his counselor as a valuable resource. She was influential in walking him through the college application process and helped him to choose schools which were part of his criteria, which included staying in New York State. She suggested schools which had a good reputation and were nearby. Since Kevin knew very little about private colleges, he relied on his counselor’s opinion and took whatever she suggested into consideration. Kevin and David both agreed that their counselor was not only influential in their college transition, but she was very influential to all his senior peers. Kevin, unlike David, was part of a college advisory which his counselor led. This college advisory was open to all seniors who where already on track to graduate that year. He recalls how:

They tell us we’re going to college as a class regardless, especially my guidance counselor. My advisory for senior year was mostly for like, students who were already on track for graduating. My advisory, most of us weren’t going to college now. They were telling all of us we’re going to college regardless. We’re the ones that’s going to be easy to go to college or whatever, which is true I think. (April, 2010)

Though the students in the college advisory were “on track” to graduate, Kevin shared with me how most of the students were not considering going to college right away. Regardless of what the students envisioned for their near future, Kevin’s counselor was constantly conveying the message that everyone was going to college. Since the majority of them had already or were close to fulfilling the requirements for graduation, the counselor shared with the students it would be easy for them to enroll in college, which became part of Kevin’s college going habitus. This college advisory class, which was not
open to everyone, was beneficial to Kevin as a resource during his transition because it provided him with a space to discuss college and the eventual transition. Kevin shared with me how he viewed the college advisory as a resource in his transition, but it was also a space where he felt pressure. Kevin illustrated how in his college advisory:

We talked about college. We talked about like what are we going to do, where are we going to go. People expect so much from me and I hated it because like I’m going to Lehman but I’m valedictorian. Everybody’s telling me no, go to private. Go to Saint John’s or go to Albany. I don’t know. I’m just like no, I don’t want to go there. It’s like people are forcing me to do stuff that I don’t want to do. I see people making mistakes already like already taking out loans and stuff. I know some people they already found their passion. My close friend is going to Florida. He doesn’t care if he has to take out a loan. He’s going over there because he wants to do rocket engineering, something like that. If I had a passion like that, I would’ve went to a private college that was specializing to whatever I have a passion for. I told everyone I’m going to Lehman to go do my associate’s and transfer out to a better college. (April, 2010)

For Kevin the college advisory provided a space for him to learn about and discuss the college transition process. This was a valuable resource for him since no one in his family was able to instill the cultural capital needed for the transition. Kevin utilized his time in college advisory to figure out what he wanted to do when he enrolled in college, but for Kevin the college advisory also became a place of contention. He felt negative pressure from others in the group concerning the college he decided to eventually attend. Since Kevin was selected as school valedictorian many felt he should be attending a “better” school than Lehman College. Many urged him to attend another college like a private institution or a selective SUNY. Kevin was uncomfortable with these suggestions and resisted the advice of others. Unlike Manolo, who planned out the next five years of his life, Kevin felt like he had no real passion, so Lehman would be a good safe place to figure out his passion. Kevin was also resistant to taking out loans and putting himself in financial debt while trying to figure out his passion. Kevin viewed Lehman as a
Kevin believed the message about going to college was clear throughout the school. All school personnel and faculty were conveying the same message. Kevin commented on how his English teacher provided time and assistance to prepare their personal statements. Kevin also shared how his guidance counselor would make everyone apply to college starting with CUNY schools. According to Kevin, this plan was shared frequently throughout the school:

Yeah. CUNY’s and then SUNY’s then after SUNY’s, private. She told everyone to do it, to apply regardless, just apply. There were some people, they applied but there were some students that were deciding not to go, or where to go. But the teachers and the guidance counselors, they were forcing us. (April, 2010)

Kevin viewed this type of assistance as accessible to anyone in the school, not just for him since he was the valedictorian. Kevin felt as if all the teachers and counselors at his school were “forcing” all the eligible students to apply to college. Though Kevin believed help and resources were readily available at his school, David never recalled getting much substantial help or advice outside of his guidance counselor and parent coordinator. David never mentioned having class time dedicated to personal statements or having access to the college advisory class. Kevin recalled how one teacher provided explicit advice about college:

My adviser, my teacher, she told us a lot about her process. She told us about her SATs. She was 10 points away from getting a full scholarship but she went to USC [University of Southern California]. She’s from New Jersey. She’s from here. She went to USC and loved it. She was going through so much. She said she was working for applications and admissions office so she would be looking through applications. She would see and she would tell us like how to do a personal statement and stuff. She knew like a lot of stuff and she told us about it. (April, 2010)
The conversations Kevin had with this particular teacher provided insider information concerning the application and admissions process, which Kevin viewed as valuable information. Kevin felt a connection with this particular teacher since she shared such intimate information about her own college-going process. The fact that she was from New Jersey, which Kevin viewed as the same as New York, validated her advice even more.

Teachers and personnel sharing intimate stories with the participants in the study was rare, but was not uncommon. School personnel moving past the discourse of “you have to go to college”, “college is going to be hard”, or “there will not be anyone to help you when you get to college” had a clear impact on the students at Poet High School, whether they had a college going habitus or not.

**Singer High School**

Nelson, Marvin and Fernando all attended Singer High School and shared different resources. Unlike Kevin and David, who were academically very different, Nelson, Marvin and Fernando were similar academically. Though Nelson was repeating his junior year at the time of the study, they had many classes together and attended the same college advisory class. They also shared a love of music.

In the following chapter Nelson discusses in great detail how he received many mixed discursive messages regarding college. These messages confused Nelson and had him oscillating on whether or not college would be a good fit for him. Despite Nelson’s confusion, he was privy to conversations with school personnel and also witnessed the conversation his peers had with school personnel. Nelson shared insight into some of the intimate conversations he had with various people at his school:
I have friends that are teachers and stuff, so when I talk to them they encourage me. They’re like, “Dude you have to, [go to college]” besides the whole get the credit and do your homework and stuff they are always like, “Look, we all in the school understand you love music, that’s your passion but if you want to make it in life and make money and be successful you have to go to college. It’s not hard.” (April, 2010)

Nelson referred to some teachers at his school as his “friends.” Nelson often listened more to what these teacher-friends had to say. Nelson’s passion for music was well known at his school, and often times presented itself as a barrier in his pursuit of going to college. Many often tried to motivate Nelson and would often have conversations with him concerning this decision. They often tried to encourage him to pursue both music and not to let college slip by the wayside. These conversations, usually took place in private and on a one-to-one basis. Nelson illustrates this when he discussed a conversation he had with an English teacher:

My English teacher from 11th grade my junior year, me and him are good friends. If we’re all in the auditorium or the counselor comes into class and he explains stuff to us, that’s when he’s stressing it out [college transition]. However, when we’re talking during my lunch period or whatever that’s when it’s more like, “Let me try to get you to be more relaxed and stuff. (April, 2010)

Nelson’s 11th grade English teacher was the most willing to share his personal experience about college with Nelson. Nelson stated:

My 11th Grade English teacher he will talk about it like he went to Hunter and he told me that his experience there was good and he told me that he’s still going there I think. I think he told me about going for his doctorate. I’m not sure, but other than that a lot of teachers talk about their experience in college. (April, 2010)

These private conversations, or activated social capital, would often shed a new light on college and would help to sway Nelson’s habitus toward college. The difference of private to public discourse was something common at Singer High and was common practice. Nelson shared how this happened on a consistent basis, especially with his
counselors:

I feel like the counselor, my college adviser, they both tell me like, look – they don’t want that chatter, like, they talk to me a lot as much as they could because our college adviser she has a lot of like seniors and stuff. She always has to talk to a lot of people but when she gets a chance she’s always like, “Hey Nelson”. She pulls me to the side and tells me like “Look you’re a good singer. Yes, we noticed, but do you really think that the knowledge that you know about music now, do you really think it’s enough to push you through to success and even if it does, do you think it’s going to last?” Because of her I always think about it. Like college can actually give me a lot of benefits and stuff. It’s not like I never knew it, but it was like I never took the chance to see those benefits. I was always like “college is whatever”. Music yes, music this and music that. My mind is always like about talking about music. It was never like, “Man when I go to this music college I’m going to learn this.” It’s always music industry and stuff. (April, 2010)

In this example, Nelson illustrates how the one-on-one conversations he had with his counselor and advisor (social capital) often made him reevaluate college as a possible option (habitus) and something which could help his music aspirations instead of impede them. These conversations provided hope for Nelson, and provided a different pathway for Nelson to contemplate. It made Nelson realize that both his dream of going to college and becoming a musician could be accomplished without sacrificing one or the other. Making that personal connection with Nelson provided a resource which otherwise did not exist in the regular school activities. In our conversations Nelson also illustrated how these conversations existed with other people at his school, namely his Principal.

Nelson’s Principal took an active role in Nelson’s schooling when it became evident that Nelson would have to repeat a grade. Nelson stated:

When I found out that I was going to have to repeat a year. That’s when he [the principal] talked to me about it, like, “Look, I know you have these things that you do after school [music] but if you want to get even your high school diploma you have to attend school and be serious about school and towards college.”  (April, 2010)

During intimate conversations, the principal tried to convince Nelson that college
was a viable next option. In trying to get Nelson to pursue college as an option, the school personnel were always careful about not trying to sway Nelson from his musical aspirations. They encouraged him to do both. These conversations had a significant impact on Nelson, and made him aware that he could accomplish both a musical career and a college education. The problem was that Nelson often found himself uncertain because of the competing private vs. public discourse at his school. As Nelson shared:

They always state the benefits and stuff. When it’s relaxed that’s when, but other than that when it’s around the classroom – when it’s one-on-one it’s relaxed and it sinks into my mind but if it’s like in class since it’s a bunch of different people and a bunch of different situations, it’s different. It’s like he [teacher] can’t just be like, “Look Nelson this is your situation, and you should do this and this and that.” (April, 2010)

For Nelson, the one-on-one conversations he had with individuals at his school activated his social capital, and provided a resource for him to counteract the negative official discourse provide by others in the school.

The mixed messages of the private vs. public discourse created confusion for Nelson, and many times had him questioning his college aspirations versus his musical ambitions. Towards the end of our discussions the private conversations and words of encouragement provided by key personnel at his school made enough of a significant impact on Nelson and he became aware that he could pursue both without sacrificing one.

Marvin’s experience at Singer High was at times similar to Nelson’s and at other times different. Since Marvin was on track to graduate on time, his interaction with the school guidance counselor and college advisor was different from Nelson’s. In Marvin’s circumstance, he felt as if the “the counselor was constantly chasing people around. Like so they can put in their stuff [college applications]” (April, 2010). Marvin felt as if the counselor and advisor were constantly putting in the time and effort to track students
down to remind them of their college deadlines and to make sure they were applying on time. Marvin felt as if the school staff were always there to support the students through the process:

They help me with, like my college aid help with looking over the sheet so that, with all my information on it was correct. She helped me with the financial aid. She told me about what colleges was suited for me, around like what I wanted in college. That was a pretty big help. (April, 2010)

While applying to schools, Marvin considered the help he received from his school, especially from the college advisor, as a resource because she was able to help him match his school based on his interest and assisted him with his financial aid. They also reviewed all his paperwork to make sure everything was correct. In Marvin’s experience, the school personnel not only helped with the technical aspect of the transition process, i.e. applications and financial aid, they were also encouraging and made sure students had the right college match. As Marvin illustrated:

They encourage you to, like, look for the school. It’s not like…like our counselor is a realist I guess, so she would say, cause she won’t, if your grades are like down here and the school’s minimum are up here she knows it’s best if you don’t try to go to those schools if your grades are like really low. (April, 2010)

Marvin’s counselor made a concerted effort to make sure she matched students with the right schools based upon their GPA and academic levels. Marvin was grateful for this because he did not want to find himself at a school were he would struggle academically or be inundated by the workload.

Marvin, like Nelson, did not totally agree with how the messages were being delivered, nor did he think the discourse was particularly positive. But Marvin interpreted the discourse and messages as more of a motivational tool to get the students prepared for college. He felt as if the teachers, counselors and faculty at the school were coming from
a good place and trying to get students prepared for college. For Marvin, it was about reinforcing his college going habitus, and as a tool for his future role as a college student. These conversations were meant to motivate, not discourage. For Nelson, he was still unsure of college as an option, so his college going habitus was underdeveloped. Since he was unsure of college, his habitus rejected these conversations as motivational tools and viewed them as barriers. This became more evident as Marvin discussed the breath and impact of conversations he had with teachers concerning college. As Marvin stated:

I guess it’s based on assumptions; they say like, for example, they say your work is due this day and if you don’t have it in on time, if you don’t have it in on time, that’s it! You fail [in college]. You don’t get credit for that. They say that and I assume, so have my work in on time by then. Simple as that. (April, 2010)

Marvin views the discourse provided by teachers as a resource, and is often times thankful to teachers for helping to create this college imagination because it helps him feel prepared for the transition. Marvin illustrated this when he stated “I feel like it’s prepared me [school] because there are some teachers there that don’t take any, don’t take excuses, they just treat you, they teach us to worry about the work and that’s it. No excuses” (April, 2010). Marvin felt as if the no excuse environment created by many teachers at the school was helpful because it helped to replicate the environment while at college. The college imagination strengthened his college going habitus, and was perceived as a helpful resource.

During our conversations, Fernando provided the least insight into the discourse and social capital he utilized at Singer High School. He did support both Marvin’s and Nelson’s assertion concerning the amount of assistance provide by the college counselor. Fernando did receive a considerable amount of help from the school counselor and shared how she assisted with many of the deadlines and benchmarks during the transition. As
Fernando said:

Yeah, she helps us for the, she helps us sometimes how we can apply for like if we need any SATs or if we need financial aid or if we need go to her to fill out a paper or an essay on our about ourselves[....] I’ve had appointments with her so she can help me through SATs [applications] and help me through – what is called CUNY.edu I guess and accounts and all that stuff. (April, 2010)

Fernando felt as if he could go to his counselor for assistance during the transition process. Like Marvin, Fernando felt as if his counselor did an adequate job of matching students to potential colleges. He said:

It’s good because when she asked you what kind of school you want, if it’s a private school or if it’s a public or if it’s a CUNY school or if it’s a SUNY, she knows exactly what school she can refer you to, and it doesn’t matter what she wants. (April, 2010)

During Fernando’s appointments with the college counselor, she would often ask what type of school he would like to attend. According to Fernando, she had vast knowledge of many schools and would often know which school would fit best based upon his needs and wants. Fernando always felt comfortable with the schools she identified and suggested. To Fernando, these were all resources he welcomed.

Another resource which Fernando identified were the college meetings and workshops. Fernando, like Nelson and Marvin, was enrolled in college workshops which all three agreed were beneficial. These meetings were a space for Fernando to share resources with other students, but also a space for him to receive information concerning college. Fernando explained:

We have always college meetings, senior meetings and all the seniors, all the top graders they get together and they talk about how college is going to be and how we got to apply and financial aid and all of that. (April, 2010)

Like all three students at Singer High School, Fernando perceived the college advisor and counselor, as well as the college workshops and meetings, as resources, although all
attached different meanings to them.

Nelson viewed these interactions and spaces as moments which provided counter narratives at the school. These interactions were opportunities for him to grow his college habitus and view college as a potential option. For Marvin, the interactions with school personnel and college meetings were opportunities of validation and anticipatory socialization. He perceived the discourse as something which was needed for him to make a smooth college transition, and the resources and conversations provided helped validate that college was a next logical step in his maturity and growth. For Fernando, these interactions and conversations just provided him with the assistance and help he needed to get to college. Though all three students attended the same school and their perceptions of the physical resources provided at the school were similar, the way they interacted and interpreted each one was different. Their access to social capital and they way it was activated for them or by them varied. Also how these social capital networks contributed to the development of their college going habitus varied.

**Finding Resources at a Closing School: Manolo**

Manolo, who was the lone participant from his school in the study, discussed some of the resources he utilized at his school. As mentioned previously, Manolo’s school, Daily Academy, was scheduled to be phased out after his class graduated. Because of the school closure, Manolo found it difficult to secure resources during his college transition. In contrast to many of the other students in the study, Manolo chose, applied, and enrolled in college with little or no assistance from anyone at his school. Manolo previously discussed how he made appointments with his college advisor, who frequently canceled or pushed their appointments further back in time. Because of the lack of
assistance, Manolo utilized whatever resources he could find which often required him to improvise.

Though Manolo openly discussed the lack of resources at his high school, Manolo did share that there were school staff, particularly teachers, who provided him with assistance and words of advice during his transition. An example is a teacher who was very influential in his decision early on to attend college and was constantly encouraging him to study for the SAT’s:

This one teacher played a big role in it. She was my science teacher from ninth to tenth grade. She was probably the only person that consistently told me to study for the SAT, which I didn't do. Luckily, I did well for not studying, but she was so forceful from the beginning, and I really didn't listen to her because I was like - “This is my own life. Leave me alone.” She even gave me flash cards. I used to work at the school, and after I was working she would have me sit down and work on an SAT book that I just recently returned to her. She was like - “Study that and make flash cards of words that you don't know.” She made me do those flash cards, which I didn't complete. When I started talking about college and everybody just started talking about it, I would say she was not around anymore as a teacher, but she... every time I would go to her home, she would ask me questions, and offer advice, I guess. (May, 2010)

During Manolo’s earlier years in school, he recalled this teacher encouraging him to study for his SATs. Though Manolo openly shared that he did not heed her advice in the beginning, her encouragement stood out to him. Later on when it came down time to study for the SATs and prepare for college he wished she was still around to provide advice. He continued to have a mentor/mentee relationship outside of school, but he wished she was physically at the school to provide the guidance he desperately needed. Because of her absence Manolo turned to other teachers at his school to provide some guidance and inspiration. Manolo also established relationships with two other teachers whom he recalled as having a significant impact in his aspirations and his eventual transition. Manolo shared:
One of them showed them to me [college majors], that's the one I got along with the most. She's all right with it, and I pretty much helped her on... because she's doing... she was the first one in their family to go to college. She was lost for two years. She just went to school. Didn't know her major. Didn't know what to do with herself. Didn't know what job to get. We pretty much spent a week together. We figured all that out because I'm known for planning stuff … (May, 2010)

In this example, Manolo shared how he felt comfortable working with this teacher because Manolo related to her life struggles. The teacher, who was the first in her family to go to college, shared with Manolo how she was lost when she first arrived at college and spent time trying to find herself and figure out how to navigate college, and the major and career she would like. Manolo, a self-proclaimed planner, worked with her to map out a potential path when he enrolled in college and after his high school graduation. This week-long planning session helped to ease Manolo’s anxiety towards his college transition and put his mind more at ease.

While discussing how he came about his intended major and the idea of a double major, Manolo shared he got this idea from one of the teachers at his school:

The person that inspired me to do that [double major] was the only person I know that did that—my English teacher. She told me she double majored and minored in something. She doesn't look like she's a crazy student either. I mean if she can do it, maybe I can do it. (May, 2010)

While having conversations with his English teacher, Manolo uncovered how she doubled majored, which was the first time he heard of such a thing. This bit of information motivated Manolo and inspired him to think he could do the same. His perception was that if she could do it, why not me. The connection he had with this teacher allowed for her to share information and provided Manolo with information he used as a resource during his college planning. In all the other conversations with other individuals in his network, Manolo was never provided information concerning double
majoring.

Without the three teachers just described, and the information they provided, Manolo may have not been as prepared as he was to make the transition considering the dire situation at his school. Manolo, unlike the other participants, received the most information about the college transition from teachers who were willing to share their trials and tribulations while in college. One difference with Manolo’s experience is he never mentioned any advice he received from his college advisor or any other school personnel.

**Conclusion**

This section illustrates how schools as a field impacted participants as they made the college transition. Though many students were enrolled in the same school, they all accessed capital at each site differently. For some, resources were similar at each school, but participants went about accessing these resources differently. For the students at Health Academy, they all viewed their teachers as resources during their college transition, but each student viewed them differently in terms of access. For Pablo, teachers were always accessible and offered advice and assistance concerning the transition without much solicitation. Pablo expressed how he believed this resource was available to all students, but both Antonio and Diego had different interpretations of teacher accessibility.

At Poet High, both David and Kevin were privy to resources around them, but identified different resources in their transition. Kevin was enrolled in a college workshop which provided information and assistance concerning the transition. David never mentioned having access to these workshops at his school. Though both students
were on schedule to graduate, only Kevin had access to this workshop resource. In contrast David discussed having access to the parent coordinator and utilized her as a resource in his transition. Though both David and Kevin attended the same school, they both activated the resources around them (social capital) differently.

At Singer High School Nelson discussed the discursive barriers which existed and how he was often confused concerning the public vs. private discourse which lived at his school. The public discourse stated that everyone was going to college, which was often in contrast to some of the other discourse teachers provided to students concerning the transition. It was only during the one-to-one conversations Nelson had with various school personnel, namely the principal and teachers he considered friends, that his confusion about college was addressed. In contrast Marvin and Fernando viewed the public discourse as anticipatory socialization process many of the teachers engaged in to get students prepared for college. These public conversations provide motivation for both Marvin and Fernando in their transition.

In all three schools, participants discussed in great detail how the college advisor played a significant role in providing both social and cultural capital for their transition. All the participants relied heavily on their college advisor/counselor for information and resources about the college transition. The only student who did not rely on his college counselor was Manolo, who had to navigate the college transition on his own. Since his school was scheduled to close, resources were scarce at his school and he often discussed navigating the transition on his own. Despite the bleak circumstance at Manolo’s school, he did recall a few teachers providing assistance during his transition. This was key for Manolo, and he was very grateful for the assistance.
Those teachers who shared intimate conversations about their own college experience had a significant impact on the students’ college going habitus. Those teachers who went beyond the public discourse to privately share their struggles in college helped to provide a counter narrative concerning the discourse provided by many agents in the field and provided inspiration for some students. This social capital was activated by both teacher and student, who built relationships that went beyond the casual teacher-student relationship.

The next two chapters will consider the important role that teachers and peers play in the college transition. They also analyze how different students access the resources teachers and peers bring in different ways.
Chapter Nine

Discursive Barriers and Resources in Schools: Teachers as Capital?

Discursive barriers and resources

The transition to college literature often focuses on barriers having to do with paper work, deadlines, financial resources and academic performance. Although these physical barriers came up in the students’ narratives, it was the discursive barriers, as well as discursive resources, that were identified by the students as making the most impact. That is, it is the conversations that students had with various people concerning the transition that mostly impacted their college going habitus. These interactions contributed to the development of their college going habitus and how they perceived the college transition.

This chapter discusses the discursive barriers confronted and resources the students obtained from the interactions with the most significant players in school — teachers. An analysis revealed that there were two consistent messages given to students by teachers, messages that can be summarized according to two themes:

1. Messages that were shallow and impersonal.
2. Messages that were about “scaring students straight.”

But this analysis also revealed that these messages had negative effects on the students, and that rather than helping, they were detrimental to the students. I start by discussing the two sets of messages that students identified.

Teachers in School: Shallow and impersonal Messages

Besides the perceptions that teachers treat students differently based upon gender,
students discussed the ways in which teachers had discussions with them concerning college. All students acknowledged that the majority of their teachers did have conversations with them about college, and the differences between the expectations in college as opposed to high school. But besides basic conversations, the students felt as if teachers never really went into much depth about the actual transition. As Pablo says, teachers “pretty much talk about just the fact that you have more responsibility in college. That teacher won’t follow you around and say, ‘Go finish your work, to hand something in’ or, ‘why were you late’?” (May, 2010).

Many of the stories the students shared were conversations with their high school teachers emphasizing the fact that college was a space where you are more of an individual in large classes, a place where professors are less concerned about how students perform in their class. Pablo shared one of the stories a teacher once told him. He said the teacher emphasized how “Some of the classes will have like 400 students, you are really just like a number. They would just write the grade without any emotion towards it. So, it's pretty detached” (May, 2010).

Pablo’s story was a common description of how life in college was described. Daniel had similar views of teachers’ involvement: “They just say, ‘If you go and do this, how are you going to be ready for college?’ That’s pretty much the main quote that they’ve used” (May, 2010). Daniel didn’t recall too many conversations led by his high school teachers concerning college. The conversations he did recall revolved mainly around their current behavior and productivity in high school and how it would not translate into success in college. In Daniel’s case, this was something that was conveyed so often that he was able to quote the teachers exactly. On top of the lack or misguided
information about college being supplied by teachers, students also discussed how the
majority of teachers never shared their own personal experiences while they were in
college. For the most part, this was something which teachers did not freely share.

Nelson discussed how distant teachers were when it came to sharing their college transition stories. He recalls how:

they talk about it, but it’s not that specific. It’s not like I went through this, and it’s just that it was hard and you have to push through. That’s how it was. It wasn’t like when you’re getting a project or something it’s going to be tough because you’re on your own and stuff. (April, 2010)

Nelson describes how teachers talk about the transition, but never get into specific details. What he was looking for were specifics about the transitions and stories he could rely upon to help him navigate the process, but the most he did get was ‘it’s hard and you have to push through.’

When the students did receive college advice or personal stories about the college transition, it usually came from a very select few teachers. As Daniel illustrates in his answer:

The majority? No, they don’t talk about college—like their personal experience. The Guidance Counselor, he told us about it all the time how he struggled, because he was a knucklehead in high school and he finally got his act together while in college and he had to take all these extra courses. But majority? No. There’s probably like two (May, 2010).

In Daniel’s case, as with many of the other students, he expressed how many of his teachers never shared their personal experiences about college. The one individual Daniel recalls sharing his experience extensively was his counselor.

Pablo also felt his teachers did not share their experiences: “A lot of them [teachers] encourage it [to go to college] but not that many of them talk about their background”
(May, 2011). He felt as if teachers all encouraged students to aspire to go to college, but many of them weren’t willing to share why they should go to college and how college had impacted them as individuals.

Pablo did feel that some Latino teachers cared more about their going to college. Pablo describes:

There was this one Latino teacher who is Hispanic and he is always pushing us saying, ‘Oh we have to change our image. They always think that Latinos don't go to college and they are lazy. You are the future, make changes and go to college’ and stuff like that. I think because he went through hard things and he doesn't want us to go through the same roads that he did. (May, 2010)

Pablo does acknowledge that this one Latino teacher in his school was concerned and encouraged the students to go to college. And yet, even he was not so forthcoming about his own personal stories about the transition.

When some of the teachers did share their experiences about the college transition, students felt they could not relate to the teachers and their messages. Pablo for example, said: “It’s not the same. I'm not going down the same road as him” (May, 2010). Pablo continued, “Sometimes I do take information from what they are saying because I might learn from it, but there are other times I'm saying, ‘Oh, that was just a teacher. I'm not going through the same road as that’” (May, 2010). Pablo acknowledged some of his teachers’ attempt to share their life experiences, but he feels as if those stories are unrelated to his own experience.

Similar to Pablo’s assertion, Daniel listens to what his teachers have to say when they share their experiences, but he feels as if the decisions they made are unrelated to his lived experience. As Daniel states:

I take what they say into consideration because many of them have gone in the
same places I’ve came from. Like say my teacher who has been in the Bronx, so he pretty much has to make the same decisions I’ve had to make. So, I’ve taken to what they say into consideration but at the same time, they did what was best for them at that time. So, whatever decision that they’re trying to push on me may not be best for me. (May, 2010)

Though Daniel feels some connection to his teachers and their experiences, especially the teacher he mentions from the Bronx, he also feels as if they made decisions based upon what was best for their lives. Daniel feels as if his lived experience, and the decisions he needs to make during his transition are unrelated.

**Teachers and School Personnel: Messages of “Scaring Students Straight” and creating doubt**

When educators interact with upper classmen, conversations about college are bound to take place. Some educators often feel compelled to tell students stories about college. Many of these stories highlight the struggle, confusion, fear, adjustment, and culture shock of the transition. Teachers and school personnel tell these stories as a way to prepare students for their upcoming transition, providing insight on what to expect. For some teachers the telling of these stories are strategies they employ to motivate the students utilizing what one student called a “scare straight” tactic. Teachers believe they have to change the behavior and mindset of their students in order for them to be successful in a college environment.

Kevin discusses in detail how the college transition was framed at his school by his teachers:

They (the teachers and school personnel) would tell us that high school is not the same as college. They would even tell us about people who graduated last year. Some of them only had two classes the last semester and they were being so lazy. They are in college now and they’re like a little bit stressed and they’re like, “Oh, my God. I went from having only two classes to having five classes. It’s even harder. It’s nothing like high school.” Even like, one day they actually told them, I
think during when the semester was over, some time in December, they told some of the alumni to come visit the school and talk to the advisories. Like even the ones that you wouldn’t expect to go to college, they actually found a way to go to college. They are in Community College now because they were like so bad the year before. They would tell us how hard it is and how you have to like put yourself up there and make sure you do everything right. They would tell us things that you have to do in college so that way you don’t fail academically. For example, saving all your work on the flash drive because sometimes professors will lose your stuff and they’ll fail you. (April, 2010)

Kevin’s discourse shows how both teachers and fellow older peers create an institutionalized image of the college transition which is scary. Kevin recalls how teachers discuss the college workload as more difficult and intense. In Kevin’s case, his school institutionalized these conversations by inviting Alumni back to discuss their college experiences. These past students, for the most part, reinforced the discourse of struggle surrounding the transition which was already provided by many of his teachers. These students who were invited back as guest speakers discussed strategies they learned, but warned the students of performing poorly academically in college. Kevin’s interaction and conversations with his teachers about college were consistent with many of the students throughout the study.

Antonio also discussed the conversations he had with teachers about the transition. Antonio said they told him: “Oh you go to college, stay focused, do this, do that’.” Antonio does not recall his teachers having detailed conversations about the transition. The only messages conveyed was to stay focused. Antonio’s recollection is similar to Diego’s, as they happen to attend the same school, Health Academy.

Antonio does recall his guidance counselor’s discussion entailing how “the workload is different. The responsibility is different because you’re on your own. That’s it.” Diego’s counselor emphasized the individuality while in college. For Diego, as with
a lot of the other students, the college transition was very sterile, one where he would not be cared for or looked after, as he was in high school.

Marvin, who was one of the students who did not make the transition though he was accepted to a college, expressed:

First, I was kinda like everybody’s been telling me, all the teachers been telling me that like high school’s a different thing. Like a very different thing, like a very different thing from college. Like in college you’re gonna be responsible for yourself. No one else is going to be babying you. You know, if you don’t hand in your stuff on time, it’s like, that’s your problem. So it’s a little bit, it’s kind of nerve wracking, I’ve never had an experience like, that but I’m anxious. I wanna go, I want to find out what it’s like. Like, I want to be like a college graduate. (May, 2010)

Marvin discusses how the discourse surrounding the transition was making him nervous and anxious. He expressed how it was something he never experienced before, though he transitioned from junior high school to high school. His teachers told him how no one would “baby” him in college, or look after him. According to his teachers, he was on his own; whether he handed in his work on time or not, everything was his responsibility.

Marvin recounts how many of his high school teachers stated that they “have more of a connection with students than what a college teacher might have” (May, 2010).

Marvin’s teachers have created an image of college as an unwelcoming place, and this has caused Marvin to be anxious, so much so that Marvin questioned whether or not he actually wanted to make the transition. Not only was this discourse similar at all the high schools in the study, the students themselves also witnessed how some of their peers who graduated prior to them, struggled with the transition. This created doubt in their own ability.

During our discussions, Daniel mentioned what he witnessed first hand at his
school. He talked in great detail about his nervousness with the transition based upon what his peers had experienced:

There have been seniors who graduated with over 90 averages but when they enter college they’ve had to take remedial, writing courses and different courses to make up for what they’ve lost in high school because high school has been a breeze for us basically. In high school you give in work last minute and you’re fine and you get to get out. But once you enter college, it’s not going to be like that. The work is more rigorous and there is more thought into the work. (May, 2010)

Daniel witnessed first-hand how many students, whom he thought were good students, struggled with the transition. Students who performed well academically at his high school, struggled when they got to college, having to take remedial classes. This made Daniel question the content of the work he was being provided while in high school. He also questioned whether he would be in the same predicament when he made the transition. This was a valid concern for Daniel, as he could only base his future performance in college based on what other alumni had gone through. Though this was a concern for Daniel, he was still sure he wanted to make the college transition and saw it as more of a challenge than a barrier.

Nelson, on the other hand, discussed the confusing and often contradicting messages he had gotten from various people at his school. Nelson did not make the transition to college right after high school. The discourse about college could have contributed to forming a habitus, which did not incorporate college as a future step in his development. During his discussions about college, Nelson discussed how his school was constantly emphasizing the fact that all of the students will go to college. Nelson states:

The school has always tried to stress going to college and instead of feeling like you should go to college, you will go to college. That’s their motto and stuff like. Instead of saying should, you should say you will, but it’s always like, if I’m
Nelson was well aware of the messages that the school was conveying about college, but he was unsure if he would make the transition because he was scared. Though on several occasions Nelson spoke of how he wanted to attend college, he often went back and forth. Nelson often found himself confused about his future in college because of the conflicting messages he was receiving from teachers and school personnel. Though they tried to instill in students that college was not an option but an obligation and everyone at the school was going to eventually attend college, this discourse was often times muddled with other messages and actions. As Nelson states: “They always talk about there’s going to be no hope. They try to compare it as like, ‘Look in high school you get your counselors and stuff and your teacher is actually telling you what you’re missing, but in college it’s not going to be like that’” (May, 2010).

According to Nelson, school personnel talk about the importance of college and how all the students will go, but at the same time they share with the students that they have no hope and will fail if they go. Nelson recalls how school personnel state:

It’s going to be you and a bunch of other people in college, and you’re going to have to step up and talk to your professor and stuff. It’s not going to be the same as high school where you can just go to class and be lectured. It’s going to be you and you are on your own. That’s it. (May, 2010)

Though these conversation probably took place during a time when school personnel felt they had to motivate students to do better in their current classes in high school, this “scare straight” tactic had a deep effect on Nelson and his college aspirations. At this time Nelson was undecided if he wanted to go to college. He was not the highest
achieving student and was struggling with just graduating high school. He was a year behind because he failed some classes. So to hear these messages made Nelson reconsider if he was a right fit for college. Instead of motivating him to do better and step his game up, this “scared straight” college discourse created discursive barriers for Nelson, which eventually manifested themselves into real barriers of anxiety, fear and doubt about his success in college.

Nelson explains how these mixed messages were conveyed to students at various time and places throughout the school. The majority of the time this discourse was shared in public with the student body by various personnel in front of the class. But these conversations also took place in private where school personnel provided various mixed messages including, ‘Step your game up’” (May, 2010). Nelson explains how he and many of his fellow peers often feel as if they are doing what “they have to do” in order for them to graduate and complete high school, but at times they are unsure because school personnel will pull them aside and tell them otherwise. For Nelson these moments have a deflating effect and often stunt his progress because he feels as if college is totally unattainable. He states:

They always say like, college is not going to be like that. There’s not going to be anybody there. Even if you have friends like your friends are going to be concentrating on their college work and stuff but they’re not going to even have time to tell you about stepping your game up and actually working towards college and working towards that degree that you want to get. It’s always negative stuff. (May, 2010)

Though the school openly states that every student will go to college, Nelson provides insight into how these messages are often different and contradictory on a daily basis. Nelson also illustrates how these messages often change depending on when and where
the conversation is taking place. When school personnel speak in front of classes the discourse is usually about the lack of hope for students when they get to college. They discuss college as a cold place where many will struggle and possibly fail. But when the conversations take place on a one-to-one basis, the conversations change from trying to scare the students straight with “motivating” discourse, to conversations of supposedly genuine concern for the students and their academic well being. For a student like Nelson, these discursive barriers have him not even contemplating the transition. These discursive barriers create a sense of doubt, helplessness and confusion. As Nelson states “It’s weird because during school it stressed us like, ‘Look man it’s going to be hard’ but if they have their lunch period with you and stuff it will be like, ‘Man it’s a good ride’ and it’s always like, ‘I’m confused’” (May, 2010). Because of these conversations Nelson has difficulty gauging the multiple stories, expectations and imaginations of college. Teachers describe to him how hard college is, and the difficulty of persisting, but at the same time they describe it as a good ride. This created doubt as to whether college was the right move.

**The Effect of shallow and scary messages: Self-doubt, fear and imaginations**

For many of the students, the varying school discourse about the college transition manifested into real concerns about their potential success. They were concerned about what college was going to be like. Many of their concerns were correlated to the discourse provided to students about their current abilities as students, and how it would or would not translate into college success. These concerns began to seep into some of the students’ consciousness and form a habitus of self-doubt. This was something Antonio expressed to me during one of his interviews. He said:
I’m not really worried about how college is going to affect me, but I’m worried more about how I’m going to deal with it. Am I going to be able to handle it? Because I know high school is a lot easier than college. So, I’m just worried about how my dedication and focus is going to be, when I’m there. (May, 2010)

Part of Antonio’s concern about college was whether he would have the dedication to function and persist. His doubt and questions concerning his ability and dedication came from school personnel discourse which was provided about the college transition. This discourse questions the ability of students and whether they will be able to function within a college environment. As with Antonio, this discourse created self-doubt and concern before even stepping foot on a college campus. Antonio was not concerned with college itself, but of how he would be motivated while in college.

Diego, who attended Health Academy with Antonio, described a similar fear concerning the college transition. Diego felt as if “college is such a big thing compared to high school, middle school. College is a big thing you have to make it or break it” (April, 2010). Diego’s description of college contained a sense of high stakes, which were conveyed to him by the many people describing college. Diego didn’t see college as just a seamless educational trajectory like his other transitional experiences with middle school or high school. He visualized it as much bigger and vastly more important compared to the other transitions. The discourse of others concerning college caused students like Diego to feel anxious about the transition. When asked about college, Diego felt as if “college is kind of intimidating” (April, 2010). Though Diego has been in college classes as part of the curriculum in his school, he was still intimidated by the transition and what to expect when he eventually became a full-time college student.

As a result of these messages, college was imagined by the students as a space
and place of struggle and fear rather than comfort, accommodation and growth. When asked about the transition Antonio stated:

> I’m not really sure. I don’t really know what to think about it, I haven’t gone there yet. I guess I think of the whole scene where we’re like studying or something, stay in the library for a very long time—studying a lot of whatever you’re having studies. That’s just what I picture. (April, 2010)

Antonio’s imagination about college consists of constant studying and struggle. Antonio doesn’t describe college as a place where he is going to grow, learn, or be very social, but of a place where he is just studying all the time in the library. This image of college came from all the conversations Antonio had with many people about college.

Marvin was concerned about this as well, and his image of college also caused him to be anxious. Marvin stated:

> That is what kinda like got me, like a little worried, but excited at the same time. I wanna know what it’s like, but at the same time it scares me I don’t know if it’s gonna be easy; if it is, I personally think it’s not as bad as they say, but it might be so. (May, 2010)

Marvin was concerned, anxious and excited about the transition. Though he was excited, he did not want to get too excited because he was worried if college would be as difficult and stressful a place as was described by those at his school. Nelson had a similar feeling of trepidation concerning college.

Nelson was more worried about the transition compared to the other students in the study, and discussed this extensively. He explained to me:

> I guess that’s the reason why I’m scared because these people, the teachers and staff, they stressed it up so much that it’s like this has to be hard work, it has to be really tough if it’s like being stressed out so much. So, that’s what gets me discouraged, I guess I can say. It’s like damn […] I don’t know if I’m going to
This discourse surrounding college as being a place of difficulty had Nelson worried. Nelson goes on to state:

I don’t know. I guess it makes me feel negative towards that, I guess because of all that negative stuff and negative energy. Then there’s always those friends and teachers that pull me aside and tell me there’s also these positives towards it, but it’s always a different reaction at different times, so I don’t know whether I believe your positive influences or your negative and stuff like that. (May, 2010)

In Nelson’s case, the constant negativity about the transition and struggles in college made him feel negative about the possibility of attending. But there were other instances where people pulled Nelson aside and shared with him the positives about college. So he was confused about who and what to believe, and this left Nelson with many questions about the transition, and whose story he should trust. This confusion added to Nelson’s habitus, which leaned towards not attending college. Nelson stated:

I feel like it does hold me back and that’s why I lean more towards music because I’ve learned a lot about what the music business is about and what the people are like in music and what can get me far in the music industry. Whereas college, all I got is negative and confused talks about college. (May, 2010)

Nelson is clearly confused about the transition to college based upon the conversation he had with school personnel around him. Because Nelson is more comfortable with music and its industry, he feels as if that would be a safer place.

Discussions about the college transition need to take place between school personnel and students. Students need to know what to expect when they make the transition. College is different from high school and the expectations and strategies
needed to persist are different from high school, depending on the secondary school you attend. For students who attend an affluent or selective high school, their high school experience is often more rigorous than college. But for students who attend a less affluent and selective school, the transition can be difficult and daunting because they have not been academically prepared. The strategies, interactions and relationships they have utilized and developed in high school, which have provided them with some success, may not work at the college level. Many students will have to acquire new skills and strategies in order to persist in college.

As the testimonies of some of the students in this study have suggested, we need to rethink how we are having these conversations with students. Using a deficit discourse and trying to “scare the students straight” may have a damaging effect. For those students who are on board with the transition and who want to go to college, these conversations will just help to fuel their desire. They may take these conversations and use them as motivation, as Yosso (2002) states, “a way to prove people wrong.” But for others, like Nelson and Marvin, who were undecided, the conversations with school personnel became a real barrier. These conversations contributed to their habitus which was not in favor of attending college. Both students felt that they were not doing well in high school, and they would be unable to persist in college without support. We need to continue to warn students about the potential pitfalls in transitioning, but at the same time encourage them and provide them with strategies that would enable them to actually make a successful transition.

The role of college advisors and a few others. Exceptions

The students’ fears and anxieties about the college transition were fueled by the
teachers’ well-meaning but disruptive discourse about college being difficult. But especially the college advisors, and a few individual teachers, helped. In this section, students discuss the multiple personnel on whom they relied for help during their transition.

Daniel, who was one of the most outspoken students about the lack of help he felt he received from his school, did share how he did receive help from his guidance counselor in “like applying to college or trying to get extra scholarships so I could go to that college” (April, 2010). This assistance went beyond just trying to secure funds, his counselor helped Daniel narrow down potential schools since Daniel has expressed with him that he wanted to become a teacher. As Daniel recalls “my Guidance Counselor told me about the college [Wheelock College] and he encouraged me to apply since it’s a teacher college and it’s one of the top teacher colleges in the country. He pushed it on me” (April, 2010). Daniel’s counselor encouraged him to apply to a particular college, Wheelock College, because of its reputation of being one of the top teacher colleges in the country. Though Daniel ended up attending another college, Lehman College, which has a reputable teacher education program in New York City, his counselor played a significant role in getting Daniel to think of Wheelock as an option. Daniel’s counselor played a significant role in his college transition and Daniel felt as if his counselor was a viable resource during the process.

Daniel also felt as if he could depend on a couple of teachers to help him decide which school he should attend, based upon their opinions of which had the best teaching programs. While trying to decide which school he should attend based upon the schools he was accepted to, Daniel felt it was best to solicit the help from some of the teachers at
his school, since they were experts in the field. Yet, he didn’t recall any teacher discussing with him what type of classes he was going to take, what to expect from his classes or the environment at any of the schools they suggested he attend. Teachers seemed unwilling to provide much more information than what was being required.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has considered the role of teachers and school personnel in helping students with the transition to college. Although the topic of college is something that many teachers continuously talk about, it turns out that their discourse is one of intimidation. Thus, the teachers’ discourse, in most cases, actually works against the students’ decision to go to college.

There are, of course, a few exceptions. Foremost is the college counselor, but the counselor’s role is limited, helping students with the practical aspects of the application and selection process. What the students’ narratives suggest is that what students really need is a caring discourse from the teachers, one that doesn’t raise doubts and fears but that asserts their abilities and capacities.

Despite the institutional concerns of teachers that students go to college, which is evident in Chapter 8, teachers are not giving these male Bronx students what they most need — trust in their ability to succeed, despite difficulties. The college-going discourse of teachers parallels that of the institutions that push students to graduate so that they look good, but that do not seriously prepare them for the college tasks. The teachers and school personnel do their job, sometimes better than other times. What they do not do is completely trust that their students will succeed because they know that they have not prepared them well.
Chapter Ten

Discursive Barriers and Resources in Schools:
Peers as Capital

The participants in the study discussed in great depth their peers and how they impacted their college going habitus. Whether it was the social capital their peers provided during the college application process, or older peers providing cultural capital by providing knowledge about college life and what to expect, students leaned on their peers heavily during their transition. At times it seemed as if students relied more on their peers, than school personnel and family. As Antonio conveyed, the students in the study surrounded themselves with peers “that take their school work very seriously” (May, 2010). These peer networks shared with each other college transition strategies such as what college to apply to. They also encouraged each other to go to attend college and provided anticipatory survival tips when at college. In this section of the dissertation I will highlight the discussions I had with students about their peers and how they viewed their role in the college transition decisions.

Peers embedded in a college-going culture

Knowing other peers who were already in college was something very common among the participants in this study. Antonio, Pablo and Diego discussed how the majority of students at Health Academy go to college. As Diego stated “almost everybody goes” (May, 2010). Antonio confirms Diego’s sentiment by adding “Yes, pretty much. The people that I guess in my class that haven’t applied or don’t want to go, I haven’t heard of yet” (April, 2010).

Health Academy, which is an early college school located in the Bronx, is known
for their college-going culture success and for having the majority of their students enroll in college. From Ivy League schools, to community college, Health Academy did a good job getting their students enrolled in college and building a college-going culture. As Pablo expressed:

In my school, it is very equal. I don't see a difference that much. I have a strong class so all of us are going to college. I don't think there is even one person who is not going to college. Some who didn't think they were going to college are going to Hostos, which is a better step than just dropping out. (May, 2010)

As Antonio, Pablo and Diego suggest, knowing someone at Health Academy who was not going to college was very uncommon. Antonio discussed: “The majority of my friends, I mean they are in college and they want to like do something with themselves but they are probably not A+ students I would say” (May, 2010). In Antonio’s case the majority of his peers who attended school with him are in college or aspiring to go to college. While sharing this with me, he made a conscious attempt to clarify how his friends are not A+ students. Health Academy’s success in getting their students into college was not an isolated phenomenon.

At Alas Academy, Daniel’s all-boy school, many of the students applied to college or had already enrolled in a college in previous years. As Daniel shared:

Most of my classmates are going away that I know. I have a few friends who have alternate ideas like staying for sports; I have a friend who’s planning on probably going to Prep School or college so he’s in between those two decisions. Another close friend of mine is planning on going out of state. So, everybody is trying to go away basically. Nobody is really trying to stay. (April, 2010)

Daniel, like Pablo, Antonio and Diego, discussed how going to college is something which was common at his school. Daniel emphasizes how the majority of his friends, some of whom he described as close, have decided to go away to college. In fact in Daniel’s case going away to attend college was more common among his peers than
staying in NYC, which was the route Daniel decided to take.

In Nelson’s circumstance, even though he was repeating a grade and contemplating whether or not college was a viable option for him, he also discussed knowing many peers who made or wanted to make the college transition. Nelson said:

I have a friend of mine, he wants to go to college, he got accepted to LaGuardia and Queensborough. Then there’s another one of my friends, he’s actually applying to go to Purchase, and one of my close friends he’s trying to go to Westchester. (April, 2010)

It didn’t take long for Nelson to think of peers who applied to college or who were already enrolled.

All of the students discussed how they were embedded in peer networks at their respective schools, where college was perceived as an attainable and viable option. The students in this dissertation study all had access to social capital through their peers. These networks were frequently activated and knowledge of the transition was routinely shared.

**Peers’ Discourse of College as Resource**

Though, as previously discussed, the students were many times unsuccessful at activating their social capital with teachers, they did so with other students and peers they knew. Given the fact that the majority of students knew peers in college or who were going, it was common for them to share knowledge and strategies. Though the students were sometimes unknowingly in direct competition with each other for admission to the same schools, they seemed not to care and were more inclined to help each other out by sharing knowledge. Many teamed up to go to a particular school together.

During our conversations, Diego highlighted how some initial conversations concerning college strategies began to formulate. Diego suggested that these strategies
don’t happen formally but manifest themselves organically. As Diego shared:

Not at first because we got stressed out in our own ways so we had little time to talk about [college] because we were trying to finish deadlines and things. At the end we figured it out – I applied to that school too. I applied to Syracuse, a lot of people applied there. A lot of people applied to Binghamton and Stony Brook. Not many people applied to Lehigh. (April, 2010)

Students were able to collaborate with each other during the initial application process. This phase of the college transition process brought about stress for Diego and his peers, so it was better to work together. After the application process was complete and while students were waiting for their acceptance letters, students began to confer and discuss the colleges to which they applied and from which they heard back. This is where, for Diego, some of the strategizing began to formalize. Diego continued:

There’s always like what colleges you get into. Everybody knows about this and that and like each other’s status or people know that I’m still waiting for some college, so they come up to me and they’d be like, ‘Did you get into something yet?’ or ‘Did you hear anything.’ So, it starts like that. (April, 2010)

In Diego’s case, he was really interested in attending Lehigh University. He was encouraged by another student, Duarte, who had graduated a couple of years prior to him, to apply. During his application process he recalled the struggles this particular student had in getting into Lehigh. Diego recollects: “I heard Duarte going through almost the same plan to Lehigh. He liked it and he told me I should apply, so that was always in my mind from my sophomore year” (April, 2010). Duarte had provided Diego with information about his struggles of getting accepted to Lehigh. Diego recalled the conversations he had with Duarte while waiting for his acceptance letter, and this comforted Diego. Along with the conversations he had with Duarte, Diego also relied on many of his classmates who were also anxiously awaiting acceptance letters. This type of camaraderie was beneficial to Diego: “It felt good that I’m not alone. I think it helps that
I was able to speak and get a lot updates. They were going through the same thing” (April, 2010). Having peers who were willing to provide words of comfort can be a resource in time of need and anxiety. Having peers who were going through similar circumstances made Diego feel less isolated during his transition. Antonio, who attended Health Academy with Diego, also relied on his peers during the college transition process.

Similar to Diego, Antonio explained how the discussions manifested and grew organically. Though Antonio’s recollection of this process is similar to Diego’s, for Antonio the discussions began a lot sooner than for Diego. Antonio explains:

Well, in the beginning of the year we were really like shocked that the four high school years went by; we were just like, “wow we’re going to college in a few months”. We just started talking, then during the process, we’ve been talking about what schools we apply to—we exchange. Then once the acceptance came in, we were talking about what schools we are accepted to and denied—things like that. (April, 2010)

Unlike Diego, Antonio recalls having discussions with his peers during the initial portion of the process and exchanging information. Details continued to be exchanged with peers throughout the process. Antonio recalled having conversations concerning the process throughout his senior year. Antonio discussed how he and his classmates often found themselves discussing what college was going to be like. Antonio recalled how he and his friends would sit around at various times during the day and found themselves discussing their college expectations. Their imagination would usually wander as they began to wonder how difficult the transition would be. Antonio said:

Sometimes we would talk about if we think it’s going to be hard. Like, ‘Do you think it’s going to be hard?’ ‘I don’t know, it might be, whatever.’ ‘This is going to come and we put our focus to it.’ But most of the time we find ourselves talking about the parties and things like that. (April, 2010)
Antonio highlights how he and his friends would sometimes find themselves inquiring about difficulty of college. Though they all usually agreed that it might be difficult, they all assured themselves that they would be able to survive and adapt as long as they focused on what needed to be accomplished. Though they found themselves questioning the rigor of college and if they would be able to survive, they usually focused on the social component of college, the parties. The possibility of college parties, and the fun they expected to have at college parties usually outweighed any concerns they had with the transition and the rigor of college academics. In Antonio’s example, it seemed as if students used their imagination of college parties as a way to overcome the anxiety that the teachers had produced in scaring them straight.

Antonio also discussed how knowing students at the school he was enrolling in was another factor which played a role in helping him overcome his anxiety:

I know one person that’s already in New York City Tech, somebody that graduated last year. I think two of my friends, or one of my friends. One of my friends that is outside of school, one of my friends that’s inside of school are going to New York City Tech. Maybe there are more I just haven’t asked around, maybe a few more people I know. (April, 2010)

Knowing so many people at the eventual institution Antonio was attending was beneficial to Antonio as he expressed later on in our next interview. Discussing his college plans with friends helped him to uncover that one of his friends where he lived was also planning on attending City Tech. As he shared, “One of my friends where I live, well it was a big coincidence that we are both going to New York City Tech, so that made me a little less, not really worried but a little more at ease that I have somebody going with me to City Tech” (May, 2010). For Antonio, knowing a friendly face at his new educational home put Antonio at ease. Also knowing peers who were also going to City Tech,
allowed for other benefits. It allowed for Antonio to investigate the campus, prior to his first day of classes. Antonio explained, “I was with a friend and we explored the campus a little bit, just to get more familiar with it” (May, 2010). Knowing someone who is going to the same college and having access to explore the campus with a friend was something Antonio found beneficial. Given the geographical proximity of City Tech to the Bronx allowed Antonio and his friend to have an impromptu visit of the campus, which seems to be something both Antonio and his friend discussed and strategized about prior to their first day of class.

Perez & McDonough (2008) suggested in their work that students often apply to colleges where there is a familiar face, family member, or acquaintance, which helps to ease the transition. Though this may have manifested itself for both Antonio and Diego, they did not intentional apply to specific campuses to attend school with peers they knew. In fact for the most part, the students in the study reported that they did not know what schools their peers were applying to until after applications were submitted.

Pablo like other students in the study, shared how he did know other students who were already enrolled in, or planning on enrolling at, City College. As Pablo discussed: “I have a couple of friends who are already at City College as me. Well, they’ll be going there next semester” (April, 2010). Information concerning who attended or was going to attend City College was not sought until after the acceptance process was complete. After learning that some of his friends were going to the same school as he, Pablo then made plans with them: “I’m supposed to be going this week or next week with a friend of mine to check out the dorms. They have tours and stuff” (May, 2010). And yet, Pablo felt as if making the decision to attend a school solely based on your friends was not a good
decision. Pablo stated that “just because my friends are going there doesn't seem like a good idea to me” (April, 2010).

None of the students in the study suggested that they applied to colleges or planned on enrolling at a specific institution because of peers. In contrast, agreements to explore the campus together were made after students had discussions with their peers and uncovered that other students were deciding to attend the same school. Diego, Pablo and Antonio discussed how their school peers played a supportive role during their transition process, specifically after college applications were already submitted, and they decided on the school in which they would enroll. This access and activation of social capital of peers provided an ease concerning the transition, and was positive and comforting, in contrast to the relationships and discourse they held with the teachers.

**Peers as informants**

Students frequently shared with me how they depended on peers to provide them with “inside” information about the transition, but more specifically concerning the institution they were planning on attending. During our discussions Kevin shared with me how a specific peer played the role of informant by helping him during the application process. Kevin viewed the information provided by this peer as valid and valuable and frequently had discussions about the schools to which he was applying. For Kevin the application process was extremely stressful and something he was always willing to discuss at length to help relieve his stress and seek guidance. Kevin relied on this particular peer for guidance for several reasons. One, because he was older, and two because he had already been through the process several times. Because of these two factors, Kevin perceived this peer as a college expert. As Kevin shared:
Kevin solicited this peer’s knowledge about different schools because he perceived this friend as an insider and possessing information “many don’t know”. Kevin respected this peer’s “insider” information and often didn’t apply to a particular school based upon their discussions. When asked why he chose to listen to this friend, Kevin shared with me that his friend:

Went to so many. I don’t know. I think he graduated from Monroe but he transferred so much. He told me his stories because I kept on telling him about how stressed I am, but he kept on giving me advice and he knows what’s good and what’s not. (April, 2010)

Kevin believed since his friend went to so many schools, he was able to provide “insider” information and play the role of informant, which made him less stressed during the process. For Kevin his friend’s continuous move from institution to institution was perceived as something positive. His friend was able to provide information on what it was like being a student at various institutions, and was able to share his experience, which Kevin felt he could trust. This friend was not the only peer Kevin knew who was able to provide helpful “insider” information.

Kevin shared with me another discussion he had with a student who was attending Lehman College, the school Kevin eventually decided to attend in the fall. Kevin shared that he “was considering taking night classes. One of my friends suggested to take night classes because they think that I would probably be more focused and I could get a day job and then take night classes” (April, 2010). In talking to this particular peer, who was
already enrolled at Lehman, Kevin contemplated taking night classes because according to this friend it would allow Kevin to become “focus more and get a job”. The thought of taking night classes was never considered prior to this discussion with his friend. In fact Kevin was unaware of this option, but began to contemplate it because it made some sense to him, so much so that he began to ask several people for further advice. As Kevin illustrates:

I asked my mom. She said, ‘Whatever you want.’ But I’ll just do this [take day classes] for now and see how it is. Then if I want to register for night classes I asked one of the ladies [at school] while changing my schedule. She said, ‘if you’re considering it or whatever, try to go as early as possible.’ So, probably I will wait until November before making my schedule right away. (April, 2010)

In asking other people, Kevin never got advice of whether or not he should take night classes. His mother said he could do whatever he wanted because she was confident he would make the right decision. While registering, the school official who helped him choose classes did not provide any helpful information. So Kevin was left to make the decision on his own, and chose to wait it out and see how he performed in day classes. Kevin viewed his peers as not just “resources” and “informants,” but also as a source of inspiration during his own transition.

In observing his peers’ current situations Kevin thinks about his options:

It’s just like, I just think when I’m around them [his friends]… they don’t tell me anything, but I just think when I’m around them because I see most of my friends from outside the school, they either already graduated and are not doing anything or dropped out. They’re just there. People like that affects me to do better than them. (April, 2010)

His friends, and their lack of commitment and motivation prompt Kevin to do better. He aspired to do more and be better than them. That was one of the reasons Kevin was so adamant on going to college; he did not want to be like many of his peers who were
Like Kevin, Daniel also shared with me some “insider” information which was provided to him by one of his peers who was currently in college.

Daniel’s family, unlike the other students, had more of an extensive experience with college. As mentioned before, both of Daniel’s older siblings went to college and both of his parents were college graduates. Daniel also had many friends who were in college and he talked to them frequently about the college experience. These conversations produced “insider” information about both the college transition and experience which for the most part helped to ease Daniel’s concern about the transition.

Daniel shared with me some of the “insider” information one of his friends, who was currently enrolled at City College, provided to him, as well as other friends:

They pretty much said the same thing. At first, it’s a shock the college environment, but after a while you get used to it. The one girl that I know, she’s attending City College at the moment. This year has been tough for her because she pretty much has to study all the time—on vacations, everything. She pretty much says it’s a struggle in your first year of college. (April, 2010)

Daniel’s network of peers in college have shared with him some of the struggles they had during their first year. Most of them have spoken about their struggle in the beginning, although they were able to acclimate eventually. This insider information, helped to ease Daniel’s fears and made him understand that everyone struggles at first. For many students, the first year is the most difficult, but knowing that many of his peers struggled with their first year provides an advantage for Daniel as he is aware he is not alone. This type of “insider” information from peers was a positive resource for Daniel.

But Daniel also shared:

Recently, somebody gave me the idea or told me that student loans are like a trap basically because of the interest rate on student loans, so that an idea would be to take out a credit card to put the payments on the credit card or something like that.
Some person in my neighborhood told me who went to that college, and that’s what they did. (May, 2010)

The insider information provided by Daniel’s friend is common. Students have been provided with such a wide range of information about financial aid and the pitfalls of taking out a student loan, that they believe anything they hear. The discussions about the positives and negatives concerning student loans are endless, but maxing out a credit card which at his age would most likely be at a higher interest rate than a government student loan was bad insider information. Since Daniel’s friend was a current college student, he viewed this type of “insider” information as a resource which he was contemplating even though Daniel’s family had experience with higher education and was in the position to provide counter insider information concerning loans. This shows how important and potentially problematic peers are in the college transition process.

**Peers as a Source of Comfort and Advice**

Even though Nelson was the only student who was unable to make the transition during the time of the study, he was able to provide some crucial insight into the conversations he overheard his peers having while they were making their transitions.

According to Nelson students were very receptive and helpful to one another during the process:

> It’s not like, ‘Oh that college is wack.’ It’s more – It’s a good thing. It’s like, ‘Yes, man if you want to pursue economics, man, you should definitely go to this college, and if you want to pursue music you should go to that college in Boston or Long Island’ stuff like that. (April, 2010)

Nelson continues to share that:

> The conversations are – I feel like they’re positive because they’re trying to see where they fit best and they’re advising each other like, ‘Man if I’m majoring in economics, where do you think I should go?’ It’s like that kind of conversation. They’re trying to get help from one another to do what they want to do. (April,
Nelson feels as if his peers are very cooperative with each other. Students provide whatever information they have about each college to help each other out in securing a better future. These conversations happened throughout the process, not just at the end. Nelson said:

Because of those conversations I feel they’re really serious, they really want to go to college. They really know that it’s going to help them so it does motivate me because I want to see if they can also help me and benefit me with what I want to do. (April, 2010)

Nelson feels as if these conversations are motivators for not only himself, and his future, but also for the students involved in those conversations. Knowing that other students are there to assist him makes Nelson more comfortable with his eventual transition, and provides a glimmer of hope after becoming confused by the discourse of school personnel. Nelson stated:

It always helps to know like if somebody heard my music like, ‘Hey man you should go to this college’ and it’s like, ‘Oh thanks I’m going to look more into that’ instead of always having to go to the college advisor. Your friends also help you. (April, 2010)

Having friends providing help, advise and words of encouragement filled Nelson with optimism as he struggled to decide if he was going to attend college. His peers, who provided a counter discourse to the narrative being supplied to him on a daily basis by school personnel, eased Nelson’s mind. Knowing that school personnel and the college advisor are not the only sources of college information is a resource Nelson seemed more inclined to use when applying to college. Though these resources may not provide accurate information all the time, it is a resource and form of social capital Nelson will
most likely choose to activate.

Like the majority of students in the study, Marvin was surrounded by peers at his school who all intended to go to college. When discussing his friends at school and their college aspirations, Marvin’s experience was similar to the rest of the students. He shared with me that at Singer Academy he did not engage in college discussions very frequently, “just when something happens, when something of importance happens, we just talk about it” (April, 2010). Similar to Pablo and Diego, Marvin and his peers only discussed important milestones. Marvin was convinced that the majority of his peers believed in a college education. This was evident in the fact that many of his friends were “really excited. I got some friends that are listed in summer programs and some friends that are enrolled over the summer. So everybody is being excited about it” (May, 2010). Marvin had several friends who were accepted into college programs and were going to attend summer bridge programs that upcoming summer. Though Marvin had a lot of friends accepted to college for the upcoming year, his social network of current college students was scarce. Marvin’s network could not provide him with much insider information concerning the college transition and what to expect during his time in college. When discussing any college friends Marvin stated:

A lot of them I don’t really talk to like that, but one of them in particular that I talk to a lot is in college right now […] I constantly, it’s like, when she, cause like, the thing about her is she is my age, so she would be a senior right now but she got her credits fast so she graduated a year early. So I constantly ask her, well much of, I constantly ask her. Like, ‘what’s it like, is it as everybody says it is’? And first it was like, ‘Oh it’s not. It’s a little hard but it’s not as much as they said,’ Now she’s like used to it. Cause she’s happy for the fact that she doesn’t have school on Fridays. (April, 2010)

Like Daniel in the previous section, Marvin’s friend, who is the same age as him but graduated early, eased some of his anxiety about college by sharing with him that college
is not as hard as he had heard or imagined it was going to be. Though his friend did have some difficulty during her initial transition, she became used to it and adjusted to college life. His friend currently in college became a huge resource for Marvin and eased his trepidation, especially when she shared with him that she did not have classes on Friday. He trusted this resource more than the resources at his school, and leaned on her for insider information.

**Making Decisions in Isolation**

Manolo, like many of the participants, got much of his college information from his social networks which included peers. Manolo shared:

I have been getting... here's where I've been getting my information from. A lot of it, I've been getting from people, teachers, people I know, people that have graduated, and most of it has been from a college board website, and my school's academic calendar (May, 2010)

As mentioned in the student profile section, Manolo’s situation concerning his school was unique to the study since Daily Academy was being phased out and eventually closed. This circumstance propelled Manolo to use any resource at his disposal to help him with his college transition. Since he did not receive much help from his college advisor, he relied on the College Board’s website to obtain pertinent information.

Manolo, out of all the participants, was the most creative with his strategies, given his situation. Manolo’s strategies and thought process were also the most complex since he was functioning in isolation most of the time. By not having many peers or family members to lean on, he began to think several steps ahead. Manolo planned out his “entire life” in a series of nights and felt as if he had his entire college pathway, and life for the next ten years, mapped out:
No, like the classes I'm taking for each major. And I'm pretty much... my first major, my first decision two years ago was psychology, and I changed that to... recently, I... actually it’s two nights ago, I started like - ‘Okay. What are my plans?’ I pretty much planned out the next ten years in three nights, and I noticed that the last four years, no one really told me the best schools, the best college to go to, and how important that was to me. This entire year to me like... This whole college process has really shown me how important that is, especially getting through those entire financial aid packages. My grades were not that bad. And I'm really going have to do good from now on, like kill myself. To be the best prepared I can be, so I can get into the workforce. (May, 2010)

While recollecting about his college transition process, Manolo shared how he was never really supported through the process. Though he was intent on going to college as early as sophomore year, and even chose a major of psychology, he was never informed about any particular colleges and what schools may be the best fit for him and his future plans. So this motivated Manolo to plan out his own path based upon the information he had accumulated from peers, teachers and people he knew who had graduated from college. This reflection process spawned into a planning session for Manolo, where he mapped out his next ten years in three nights. The lack of resources Manolo had made him become proactive and make sure he was prepared for his potential future. As Manolo shared, the isolation of his college process is what really made him reflect and make sure he was prepared for his eventual competitive future:

I see that's one big competition like what college you go to, being double major, what you do. I'm considering… No, my plan is to double major because at first I was afraid to double major because I might crack down under all that work. But I'm making it work. The more I take on, the better prepared I am to enter into the workforce. My plan is to double major in Biology and Business... (May, 2010)

The competition Manolo faced while applying to colleges made him reconsider what his future in college was going to entail. Manolo felt as if he was unprepared for the college transition, but he was going to make sure he was prepared for the workforce, and he
imagined being a double major in both biology and business, not a single major in psychology, would benefit him the most moving forward. He was optimistic about his opportunities based upon his plan, and was intent on making it work. Though double majoring in both fields may be beneficial in the long run, accomplishing this feat was going to require a lot of work. Since Manolo’s social network was minimal, he did not have many people around him he could speak to about his intended decisions. Having an extensive peer network, one where he had peers currently in college, would have probably steered Manolo away from his plan.

**Conclusion**

What this chapter has made clear is that despite the discourse that high schools are making students college-ready, they are not being successful in supporting the transition of poor Latino males to college. Instead, working class and low income Latino males in the Bronx fend for themselves. They find their own network of resources — one of the most important among them are peers. It is peers, often Latino, male and poor like themselves, that offer poor Latino male high school students the comfort, ease and support that these students need to take the next step into college. It is others peers like themselves who trust in their ability to not only resist the Bronx, but also negotiate the under-preparedness with which they face college. Although the institutions put up a front of preparing the students for college, neither students nor teachers quite believe they are ready. Teachers are constantly playing a game that make them look good and able to graduate their students, although they understand they are not quite preparing them for college. Students also see through the game in which schools engage. But they trust themselves, their abilities to do better, their intelligence and curiosity, their motivations
and hard work. After peers, the greatest resource these students have is themselves.
Chapter Eleven

Conclusion and Recommendations

This dissertation has discussed various barriers and resources ten young Latino males from the Bronx faced as they transitioned from high school to college. The goal of this dissertation is not to minimize or disparage physical barriers and resources many young men and women face/access on a daily basis as they interact with school. Its purpose is to extend and advance the conversations, to examine the lives of our young men and women more deeply in order to better understand the complex nuances of their transition to college. Barriers like socio-economic status, lack of social and cultural capital, poor teaching, over-crowded schools, and poor academic pedagogy and low rigor have been examined to a great extent in the literature. Resources such as exposing students to college, engaging students in participation in a college-going culture, extra academic help and anticipatory socialization programs have been identified to assist students with their transition. These barriers and resources have been analyzed in research that many times discuss a “fix” for this phenomenon resting in addressing one of the many above mentioned barriers with a single resource, or the “silver-bullet” theory I discussed briefly in the introduction.

Physical barriers and resources are real. There is no denying them, but even with the creation of programs addressing many of the disparities, young men of color, specifically Latino males, are still not making rapid increases in accessing higher education. They are still attending and completing college at much lower rates than many other ethnic groups. A deeper critical analysis of this phenomenon is needed. This was...
the endeavor of this dissertation. By incorporating the lived experience of ten young Latino men, I gained more insight into how they were able to make the transition despite the barriers identified in previous research.

The students in this study did not come from affluent backgrounds, were not embedded in copious social capital networks, their families did not have an ample amount of cultural capital (as defined by Bourdieu). They also did not attend prestigious schools, nor did they live in wealthy neighborhoods. These young men lived and functioned in the Bronx, a borough which often evokes narratives of despair and failure. And yet, to the contrary of what is expected of them according to the literature, they were able to manufacture a level of success and provide a counter-narrative to the common discourse. Their counter-narratives unveil what really counts in the transition to college. Neither the neighborhood, nor the family, nor the school were sufficient barriers or resources to decide on the students’ success or failure in transitioning to college. The male students in my study resisted the poverty of the Bronx and the images of failure that the Bronx conjures. They were able to negotiate the social and economic capital of their families to their advantage. For example, the mother’s care and belief that their children could make it to college was enough social capital to disrupt their lack of family economic capital. Students believed in their capacity to overcome difficulties, and were unwilling to simply let the family take credit for their success, although they acknowledged the strength that they gathered from their families.

The Latino males in my study spent most of their day in school, and it was in school where they got messages about college, from teachers and peers. Interestingly enough, despite the unequal treatment they received in school as Latino males, they were
able to navigate the schools’ discouraging messages about college. It turns out that the Latino young men in my study were able to understand the difference between the institutional discourse of “graduation” and the practices to which they were exposed. Schools were interested in graduating students, not in preparing them for college. The students themselves, however, wanted not only to graduate, but to do so with the understandings and skills required to be successful in college, something that they all felt they had not been appropriately prepared for in the schools.

One of the most significant finding is that the discourses used by both family and school personnel to encourage these students to go to college in turn alienates them. The discourse about how difficult college is and how mature one has to be in college results in students feeling doubt, anxiety, anger, and fear. Teachers continuously scare the students, instead of delivering a supportive discourse. Teachers questioned the students’ abilities to do college-level work, and at the same time delivered a curriculum that pushed students to graduate without any real preparation. Teachers also made students feel inadequate, fearful, anxious and unprepared.

Despite the literature that signals the important role that family and schools have in the college transition, the students in my study instead named their own peers as a significant resource they had in the transition to college. It turns out it is not wealth nor fancy educational programs that are the most valuable resources for these students. The most important support in the students’ transition were their own peers, students who like them were struggling to make the transition. As Bourdieu (1990) states:

People who occupy the same field share similar habituses and produce/ reproduce that field through practice in similar ways. Social practices that materially produce/ reproduce culture are not, however objectively determined, nor are the exclusively effects of intentional activity by individuals. Paradoxically,
they are the conditions of possibility for both field and habitus, and they are constituted/reconstituted as agents act within the limits of action afforded by the field. (p.67)

Students in chapter 10 all shared how they had similar aspirations as their peers, therefore producing a college going culture, which they bought into. Though the field, and the capital they possessed limited their actions, they still supported each other through the process. This is an important finding since it suggests that a peer-support program would be significantly effective in helping Latino males make the transition to college. All of these findings were possible through marrying a qualitative research method with Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of practice.

As mentioned in chapter 1 and 2, the majority of the research concerning this population is shrouded in an epistemology which is dominated in quantitative research examining a specific aspect of this phenomenon. Though these studies are important, they don’t reflect the rich, nuanced experience of the college transition which can only be captured utilizing a qualitative research method. Moreover, marrying a qualitative research method with Bourdieu’s theory of practice which accounts for the field (structures), habitus (dispositions and agency) and capital (resources and knowledge), I was able to expose the power of discourse and how the interpretation and negotiation of this discourse by the students supported their college transition.

For the majority of the students, their college going habitus became unwavering in their pursuit of higher education. The habitus would not allow for barriers to become impediments, but instead be viewed as challenges. It would seek and create resources often where there were none.
A College Going Habitus

The key unit of analysis for this study was the student’s habitus and how it was shaped to aspire and eventually attend college. As Maton (2008) suggests, the habitus consists of “dispositions, beliefs, values, cultural rules, a way to view the world, a matrix of perceptions, durable, transposable, not set but evolve over time, our experiences have helped shape our vision” (p.52). College is the only time in a student’s educational trajectory when they have the choice of whether or not they want to attend. Through the K-12 pathway, students’ decisions to attend school is usually made for them, either by parents/guardians or laws enacted by the state in which they reside. College is about aspirations and dispositions, and therefore a positive habitus towards college is needed. As Webb, Schirato & Danaher (2002) suggest: “in order for particular habitus to function smoothly and effectively, individuals must normally think that the possibilities from which they choose are in fact necessities, common sense, natural or inevitable” (pg 38-39). Latino male students must view college as a necessity, a next logical step in their life trajectory in order to aspire to make the transition. The majority of the students in my study did just that, they saw college as a means to an end. Some of the findings in this study also suggest that as they negotiate the transition, they must adjudicate the discourse, which surrounds the transition.

The fields students encountered on a daily basis provided messages, discourses and a narrative which either manifested themselves as barriers or resources for their college transition. The interpretation of these messages and discourse contributed to their college going habitus. For the students who made a successful transition, their college going habitus was key in navigating the bumpy terrain to college. Students unconsciously relied
on their habitus to get them through tough situations. As mentioned earlier, the habitus is molded based on the interactions with the field(s) along with the accumulation of both embodied and objectified capital. In this dissertation I was able to present some insight into how each students’ college going habitus was shaped and how it was the impetus of their transition.

The imagination of college was critical for many students because it created the illusion of college being more of a fun social place as opposed to being unwelcoming and lonely. Students often found themselves sitting around discussing what college would be like. Moreover, students discussed student life, in particular parties, as a source of motivation for their transition. Though these conversations concerning college were used in countering negative discourse, it did not prepare them academically for college. Instead it provided them images to add to their college imagination.

For almost all of the students, their college going habitus helped to guide them during difficult and trying times. Incorporating the functions of the habitus as described by Webb, Schirato, and Danaher (2002) I was able to understand how the imagination of college was created through the habitus. The college imagination was based on an assessment that college is necessary for future life goals. Each student who made the transition forged attitudes and behaviors conceding their outlook of college which lent themselves to making the transition. This was corroborated in their initial actions early on in the transition and throughout the process. No matter what presented itself during their journey, the majority of students were resolute in making the college transition. They envisioned college as a natural next step in their lives, making conscious decisions about the transition, but being driven by their unconscious habitus. In this study, the
participants’ habitus was constructed through their interaction with various fields (i.e., The Bronx, their respective school, families) along with access to and the accumulation of capital (social and cultural). I consider these below.

**The Impact of the Field**

Bourdieu (1990) argued that “over the time span of an individual’s life, he or she may pass through different fields and compete for capital with varying degrees of success within them” (p.68). In this study participants passed through multiple fields as they transitioned from high school to college. They had to negotiate the field of the Bronx, their schools and family members as they made their transition. In each field students negotiated the accumulation the scarce resources of capital differently, some with more success than others. In her analysis of Bourdieu & Wacquant’s (1992) work, Thomson (2008) states that in order to understand the field you must:

> Analyze the habitus of social agents, different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find a definite trajectory within the field… a more or less favorable opportunity to become actualized. (p.75)

This study did just that, by demonstrating how the habitus is a process of the interaction with various fields and the accumulation of capital.

A common variable present in all the students journeys was their residency in the Bronx. *The Bronx*, unlike other large urban communities, is caught in an imaginative time warp where individuals and institutions can’t move pass the deficit filled discourse.

While teaching at Brooklyn College during the Fall 2013 semester I provided a group assignment for students to go out into various neighborhoods in New York City that have been traditionally defined by the presence of their Latino/Hispanic residents. Students avoided going to the Bronx as much as they could, even though it has a long history with
the Puerto Rican community of NYC. Students shared with me they were worried about their safety and concerns of being robbed, stabbed or worse shot. Though crime can happen anywhere, they associated crime and the lack of safety with the Bronx.

Students in this study were well aware of the negative discourse about the Bronx and were reminded of it frequently by teachers, the media, family and friends. Their awareness of the discourse which surrounded the borough they called home manifested a sense of pride and resistance for many of the participants. Students discussed how they were proud to call the Bronx home and there was an honor in “surviving” the negativity. They strove to resist negative constructs associated with them as individuals from the Bronx, and yearned to reconstruct a counter-narrative of what it meant to be from the Bronx. Though they witnessed negativity often, they viewed their eventual acceptance and completion of college as a way to elude the negativity of the Bronx and to construct a new identity. The interaction and messages with the field of the Bronx, reaffirmed for many of the students why college was a viable option for their future.

School was another field students had to negotiate during their transition. In this dissertation study school played a significant role in presenting and shaping barriers and resources students encountered which had a paramount role in molding their college going habitus. Students discussed in great detail the messages they received from the school, which was part of a larger public discourse at each respective school. Though the school did a good job of discussing college as reality publicly, privately some students felt as if their school did not do an adequate job of going beyond just access. Many felt as if their high schools fell short in preparing them to succeed in college. As both Daniel

---

9 I shared this story with my Bronx students I was teaching during the same semester and they said they don’t like Brooklyn anyway.
and Nelson illustrated, there was a separation of what the school expected on a macro level and how it played out on a micro level in the classroom. Students felt as if their school prepared them just to graduate from high school, by providing all the academic requirements for their diploma. But the students felt they were not prepared for many of the barriers (academically, socially and psychologically) they expected to encounter while in college and this created anxiety concerning their own expectations of college compatibility. Because of their interactions with older peers enrolled in college, participants in this dissertation were conscious of the limitations of their high school curricula, and the role their school played in their lack of college preparation.

**The role of Capital**

In this study participants were negotiating and trying to acquire capital as they made the transition to college. As Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) suggest “in empirical work, it is one and the same thing to determine what the field is, where the limits lie, etc., and to determine what species of capital are active in it, within what limits, and so on”. (p. 98) This study was able to demonstrate how various fields overlapped and where the limits of various fields like school and family lied. Also the data unveiled how Bourdieu’s three guises of capital were in constant play during the transition. Students used various strategies to accumulate capital as a resource to overcome barriers in their transition. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) argue that:

> The strategies of agents depend on their position in the field, that is, in the distribution of the specific capital, and on the perception that they have of the field depending on the view they take on the field as a view taken from a point in the field. (p.101)

Each student used various strategies depending on the amount of economic, social and
cultural capital which they possessed and their view of the college as a natural next step. These strategies played out in various different ways, but the common theme among all the students was how they negotiated capital as a resource in their trajectory.

Schools as fields were social structures where students accumulated capital to aid them through their college transition. The lack of cultivation of social capital with teachers presented a barrier for many of the students. The inability of teachers to go beyond the mechanical, technical discussions of college and the unwillingness to share their personal experiences while in college hampered the amount of useful information students could have gathered while making the transition. When teachers and school personnel did show an interest in the students’ college transition and success it was presented as “scared straight discourse”. Teachers would warn students about the pitfalls of college if they continued their high school behavior. These warnings were presented in imaginative stories of college being an isolated place, where you were not cared for, creating an imagination of college which lived in every participant. For the majority of the students, the “scared straight discourse” received from their social capital networks of teachers did not thwart their conviction to go to college. And yet, though this discourse did create anxiety and trepidation about college, many of the students with a strong college going habitus took this discourse as a warning and felt this was just another challenge they would have to overcome on their journey.

For Nelson, the one student who was unsure of his college future and who did not make the transition, the “scared straight discourse” created discursive barriers and brought about doubt. He constantly questioned if he was a match for college based upon the messages he was receiving and his performance in high school. Nelson felt as if he
was having trouble with just completing high school. The scared straight discourse he received solidified his trepidations but often went counter to many of the personal conversations he had with teachers and school personnel. These mixed messages, as he referred to them, created confusion for Nelson that caused him to go back and forth between his musical aspirations and college. The scared straight discourse Nelson encountered created discursive barriers that eventually turned into physical barriers and impediments.

Despite students discussing how the majority of teachers would not go beyond technical assistance in transitioning to college, there were students like Manolo, Pablo and Nelson who identified a small number of teachers and school personnel who in fact did share personal information about their college experience and went beyond a mechanical and technical discourse. These teachers had a lasting impact on the students and helped reinforce their college going habitus, even for Nelson. Teachers were bearers of capital and decided when they would distribute social and cultural capital to students. According to Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992), agents with the most capital in a specific field,

> are bearers of capitals and, depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution. (p.108)

Teachers possess the most amount of capital in schools, so they in essence play the role of gatekeeper in how to distribute capital and to whom. Teachers in this study at times withheld capital and would not allow social capital networks to be activated. Based upon the data, I cannot assume why they withheld the transmission of capital. A deeper
understanding can only take place by incorporating teachers into the study, something to pursue in the future. The data did reveal that the school counselor was the one person who did not withhold information and capital towards college.

The school counselor, played a significant role in helping to shape the students’ college going habitus by providing both social and cultural capital during the transition. Students discussed how the college counselor was an individual at their schools who provided information about colleges, made sure they were on time with their applications, and was helpful in finding a proper match. The information provided by the guidance/college counselor was viewed as authentic and students usually complied with whatever the counselor suggested/recommended. The guidance counselors were seen as caring individuals at the school, who had their best interest in mind. Based upon the discussions I had with the participants, if there were no guidance/college counselors the students would have encountered more obstacles in their transition. This was evident in Manolo’s case where he had to make all of his college decisions without the help of a counselor. Counselors many times were viewed as experts, and information they provided concerning college (cultural capital) helped the majority of participants in the study make a successful transition.

Peers were another source of capital which contributed to the participants’ college going habitus. Many students relied on the information their peers provided them about college. Older peers played the role of informants for students, providing them with what they considered authentic insider information concerning college. Though the students viewed this information as authentic, it was not always the best information as Daniel’s case shows. Students were more inclined to listen to their peers as opposed to adults
because they viewed the information provided by peers as more trustworthy. Peers were also responsible for creating college-going cultures, where they supported each other during the transition, provided and shared resources, and helped to create an imagination of college which often went counter to the discourse provided by school personnel.

Despite the fact peers were often in competition with one another, they never viewed each other as competitors and freely supported each other during the transition. This activation of social capital, along with the information provided by peers in the form of cultural capital, helped sculpt students’ college going habitus. Though each student discussed the capital made available to them at their respective schools, the availability of capital was different for each student.

Eight of the 10 students attended the same three schools. Poet high school, Health Academy and Singer High School had multiple students who participated in this dissertation study. Regardless of their shared physical space in schools, their transitional experiences were all different. Students who shared the same school discussed, unbeknown to them, how their respective transitional experience were all different in how they accessed and were presented with resources, as well as the barriers they encountered. Relationships with teachers were different, and even the perception of how helpful personnel were in the transition varied by student.

Besides school, the students respective families were a source of capital which contributed to the nurturing of their college bound habitus. The majority of students who made a successful transition reported how their families’ expectation was that they would attend college. For the majority of students who made the transition, college was imagined from an early age, and parents, specifically their mothers, nurtured this
imagination and made sure it became reality. It was common for mothers to constantly check in with their sons about their transition, often encouraging them to access resources, like college fairs. Mothers provided capital, but often it was capital not captured in Bourdieu’s construct. Yosso’s concept of community cultural wealth became a useful analytic concept/tool in this section of the dissertation because it was able to frame the type of embodied cultural capital instilled in the students, specifically aspirational capital. Yosso (2005) describes aspirational capital as:

- the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals. (p.78)

The nurturing instilment of aspirational capital in the participants, mainly by the mothers, contributed to their college going habitus, allowing them to overcome barriers and aspire to go to college. The participants’ mothers and family members were able to support their development with aspirational capital throughout the process. Despite many of the mothers and family members not possessing transitional cultural capital, Yosso’s theory provides a framework to capture other forms of parental involvement which were essential to the students’ college transitions.

**Back to habitus**

Throughout this dissertation I was able to showcase how utilizing Bourdieu’s theory of practice as a theoretical lens can help to unravel other barriers and resources which appear during these 10 young males’ college transition. This dissertation highlights how discursive barriers play a most important role during their transition. The discursive barriers added another layer of impediments in the students’ college transition which has received little attention thus far. For all the students, the physical barriers were a constant
they all had to overcome. Issues around socio-economics, lack of academic preparation, poor neighborhoods, lack of social capital and cultural capital were issues with which they all had to contend. But the discursive barriers which students encountered is something that is missing from current studies surrounding young males and their college transition. In this study, the effect of these discursive barriers were highlighted. Family, guidance counselors, but especially peers were utilized to overcome these barriers. Students’ college going habitus was the greatest resource many of the students called upon when dealing with barriers. Their will to go to college, regardless of circumstances prevailed. From an early age and through the interactions with many fields, along with the accumulation of multiple forms of capital, college became part of their embodied imagination. Their college-going habitus interpreted discursive barriers and messages from the field as challenges, as opposed to absolute obstacles. Their college-going habitus viewed their current environment and situation living in the Bronx as not a cause for despair, but a need to resist to prove everyone wrong. Their college-going habitus viewed college as a natural step in their future goals and aspirations and as part of the game. This college-going habitus provided the agency for the students to make the transition from high school to college.

In the beginning of this dissertation I briefly introduced the study I conducted at Hunter College as part of a Master’s thesis project. As I complete my analysis of my current dissertation project I can’t help but recognize the similarities. Now, just like then, it was the students’ habitus driving their decision and constructing their perceptions of college. I feel as if the habitus is what needs to be examined in great detail. Everything else will follow the habitus.
**Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to extend the conversation concerning Latino males from the Bronx making the transition to college and to disrupt the current discourse and framework surrounding Latino males. This study has several implications for scholars, policy makers, educators and family members. Given that my study sample and geographical location are very specific and limited, the findings may not lend itself to all Latino males, but these recommendations may be relevant for some:

1. Encourage research on the role of school in shaping college-going habitus
2. Return high schools to the business of educating students, rather than just graduating them.
3. Switch the school discourse about going to college from “scared straight” to authentic care.
4. Educate teachers about gender dynamics
5. Build on the power of peers
6. Engage mothers in the college transition process
7. Build a positive college imagination by providing space for reflexivity

Below I comment on each of the seven recommendations listed above.

1. *Encourage studies of schools in shaping college-going habitus.*

   The school was the one field where the majority of the discursive barriers and resources lived. Because of this, a deeper examination of the impact of schools in how it shapes the college going habitus is needed. Researchers should be encouraged to pursue this question.
2. **Return high schools to the business of educating students, rather than just graduating them.**

Students in the study discussed in great detail how their respective schools just prepared them to graduate high school but not succeed in college. As Ravitch (2010) argues, during the Mayor Bloomberg/Chancellor Klein era, school practices in New York City shifted to mirror business management techniques based on free market principles where standardized testing became the norm. The students’ critique of how their schools were just getting them prepared to graduate was a reflection of the free market school system promoted by Mayor Bloomberg. Schools need to return to the business of educating.

In November 2013, New York City elected a new mayor, Bill Di Blasio. Though it is early in his tenure\(^{10}\) there is a sense of great optimism that the emphasis on high-stakes tests will be lessened. We need high schools to educate students, giving them the educational knowledge and cultural capital to survive in college, and not just simply pushing them to graduate. Students should graduate from NYC schools with the confidence that they will be able to successfully navigate and succeed in higher education. Increasing graduation rates should not be the only concern. Making sure we have well prepared students for college should be the goal.

3. **Switch school discourse about going to college from “scared straight” to authentic care.**

From the students’ perspective, teachers often provide a “scared straight discourse” to help the students become “prepared” for the rigor of college life. The scared

\(^{10}\) During the time of the completion of this dissertation he barely made 100 days in office
straight discourse provided by teachers was often presented as caring in the hopes of modifying student’s behavior. But schools need to switch this discourse to one similar to what scholars (Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999) describe as an aesthetic form of caring “whose essence lies in an attention to things and ideas” (Valenzuela p.22). In her work on subtractive schooling, Valenzuela (1999) calls for teachers to enact a form of authentic caring. Speaking about Puerto Rican students, Nieto (2000) and De Jesús (2012) also call for school practice engulfed in caring to help bolster student achievement.

As Greene (1995) states: “in many respects, teaching and learning are matters of breaking through barriers—of expectation, of boredom, of predefinition” (p.14). A caring college imaginative discourse would do just that, break down predefined barriers to college access and success by activating the social and cultural capital, which lives in all teachers.

4. Educate teachers about gender dynamics

Teachers not only have to be aware of their discourse, but they need to be aware of how gender dynamics plays out in the lives of male Latino students. Cammarota (2004) discusses how these gender politics manifests for Latino students in West Coast City (pseudonym). In his study he describes the differences in schooling practices towards Latino male and female students and how they resist “a range of orientations to schooling, including the motivation to graduate and attend college, the proclivity to cut class and drop out of high school, and the drive to seek assistance and participate in community education programs” (p.53). More research surrounding gender dynamics and schooling for Latino males needs to be conducted. But until then, teacher should be trained to be more reflexive on how their conscious or unconscious expectations of
students, based upon gender, may have a potential negative impact and create barriers toward accessing college.

5. **Build on the power of peers**

   The power of peers is many times an untapped resource which can be used to “reach” students outside of adult interactions. Though this is a powerful tool, it can also be problematic. If provided with inaccurate information, students can often find themselves in worse situations. By training peers to be mentors, and providing them with the tools needed to ensure they are providing accurate information, peer-to-peer mentorship could be a useful tool. Each peer-to-peer program should be organic to the school site and population. Providing peers an opportunity to construct and be involved in conversations which run counter to the deficit discourse which surrounds Latino males may be an effective way for this population to overcome many physical barriers.

6. **Engage mothers in the college transition process**

   Schools also need to incorporate family members, specifically mothers, into the college transition process. In their work, Gándara and Contreras (2009) discuss five risk factors for Latino students’ failure upon entering school. They were: “poverty, a single-parent household, a mother with less-than high school education, a primary language other than English, and a mother unmarried at the time of the child’s birth” (p.67). Two out of the five risk factors place mothers as a key component to why Latino students are not excelling at school.

   In this study, participants discussed the influence mothers had on their college aspirations. Eight out of ten students discussed the role mothers had in shaping their college going habitus. Though working with parents is difficult, it is important. Mothers
of students in this study instilled in them from young a young age that college was not an option, but a necessity. Schools could provide workshops for parents during the early years in high school when parental involvement is still high, in order to help parents better grapple with the complexity of the college transition. Schools may also be able to partner with community-based organizations to provide college workshops for parents. By enlisting the help of parents, especially mothers, schools could build strong coalitions in combatting the lack of representation of Latino males in college.

7. **Build a positive college imagination by providing space for reflexivity**

Imagination often allows us to dream of lives outside our current lived experience and is very powerful. As Greene (1995) so eloquently states, “imagination is the capacity to think of things as if they could be otherwise” (p.16). The imagination of students in this study allowed them to think of possibilities outside the Bronx and to think of college as a means of social mobility. The students’ imagination of college and its benefits, as well as what college life would be like, is discourse which resided in the students’ habitus. Since none of the participants were enrolled in college at the time of the study, they relied on others to help them mold what they envisioned college to be like. Their imaginations were limited to these conversations with teachers which at times were empowering, and other times were problematic. Their peers who were already enrolled in college provided better information about college. Students relied on these conversations to help them construct their imagination of college, but the opportunities for these discussions were limited. Often during the study, students would share how they wished they had a place to discuss college outside of classroom time. Students need safe spaces in school where they can discuss and construct a positive imagination of college.
Moving Forward

This dissertation aimed to move past the deficit-filled research which currently exists around Latino males and college. Its goal was not to denounce the prior research or minimize the factors which contribute to the lack of representation of Latino males in college, but to provide a counter-narrative which challenges and disrupts the larger narrative and discourse surrounding this population. Though Latino male representation in college is low, there are young men who are making the transition. We need to spend equal time studying “successes” as well as “failures”.

In addition to bringing these successful men from the margins and introducing them to the larger conversation, we also need to understand that no matter how well or how poorly students perform in school, they all encounter barriers and utilize resources in their transition. This study was successful in showing how barriers and resources live in the discourse and messages students receive on a daily basis from the schools they attend, the family members they interact with, and the neighborhoods they live in. As shown in this study, these discursive barriers and resources can be just as powerful as its physical counterparts. Bourdieu’s theory of Practice provided the framework to uncover these barriers and resources, but it can also be limited in totally understanding the transformative power of discourse. Future research should be conducted to understand this discursive layer and all its complexities incorporating a theoretical framework which is best situated to do so.

Whereas Bourdieu’s theory of Practice falls short in understanding the complexity of discourse, it did lend itself to uncovering these discursive barriers and resources and helped to challenge “silver bullet” solutions for this population. As mentioned in chapter
many studies frame the failure of many Latino males in transitioning to college as "something" they lack — the lack of mentorship, of financial aid, of social and cultural capital, of good schooling. Bourdieu’s theory of practice allowed for the dispelling of silver bullet theories and challenge much of the social and cultural capital studies which currently exist. There is a need for more qualitative research on Latino males making the transition to college.

Finally we need to be aware of the college imagination which lives in each student making the transition. For some, this imagination is consumed with the social aspect of college provided in movies such as “Animal House” and “Old School” which highlight the “fun” side of college. The students are also constructing other imaginations of college, that run counter to these movies. The discourse provided by schools and family in this study provided an alternative college imagination of higher education and often framed college as a place of individuality and isolation. We do not need to scare our students in order for them to succeed, we should be nurturing them and watching them grow. Research with the sole purpose of understanding the college imagination and how it is constructed is needed. We hope this study is a beginning.
References

Antrop- Gonzalez, R., Velez, W., & Garrett, T. (2005). Donde estan los estudiantes Puertoriquenos/os exitosos? [where are the academically successful Puerto Rican students?]: Success factors of high-achieving Puerto Rican high school students

*Journal of Latinos and Education, 4*(2), 77-94.


College Board. (2011). *The educational experience of young men of color: A review of research, pathways and progress*


