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First generation Hispanic high school students going to college: experiences that support decisions and college going pathways

Norma Ibarra-Cantú
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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Experiences that Support Decisions and College Going Pathways

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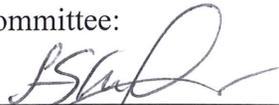
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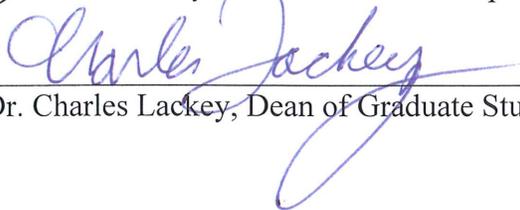
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FIRST GENERATION, HISPANIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GOING TO COLLEGE:

EXPERIENCES THAT SUPPORT DECISIONS AND COLLEGE GOING PATHWAYS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction

by

Norma Ibarra-Cantú

December 2010

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all my participants who will be the first in their family to complete high school and attend college. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. This study could not have been possible without your knowledge and insights about your schooling experiences. Remember that being first comes with a responsibility to mentor and guide those behind you. I wish you the best in pursuing a postsecondary degree and I hope one day you can also write your own dissertations.

I also dedicate this work to all the women who came before me, my mother and aunts. You were an example of courage and determination. As I complete this work, I embark on a new journey to lead and inspire others.

Acknowledgments

Ever since I was a child, I knew I wanted to go to school to get an education. I made a list of my goals and one of them was to one day earn a doctoral degree. As a child I did not know what I wanted to study; all I knew was that I was going to get the highest degree possible to help my family. I did not know how I was going to accomplish this dream. The journey toward that dream was a challenging and exciting adventure, which could not have happened without the support of many people.

To my mother Irma Ocampo Ibarra, thank you for being an example of courage, survival, endurance, and honesty. Nothing ever stopped you from moving forward. You taught me to fight for what was right and never give up my dreams. From you, I learned to have faith in God and to always put Him first in my life. Thank you for being patient and taking care of my son, Mango. Thanks for all the hot meals, your prayers and words of encouragement. I could have not completed the doctoral program without you. Because you gave it all for my brother and I, I wanted you to know it was all worth it and hope you are as proud of me as I am of you.

For your patience, encouragement, understanding, and love, I am grateful to my lovely husband, Manrique Antonio Cantu and my son, Manrique "Mango" Antonio Cantu. Thanks for all the sacrifices you made during this process. Thanks for all the gifts, cards and flowers. You always knew what to do to make me relax and make me smile. Thanks for staying up with me to keep me company as I wrote for long hours. I love you!

My brother, Jose Ibarra and Jessica Ibarra, my sister-in-law, thank you for all your support. Thanks for believing I could do this and taking over some of my duties at church.

Thanks for taking care of my son and attending his soccer games and school activities when I was not able to attend. Jose and Alondra Ibarra, my nephew and niece, thanks for all your understanding when I was not able to help you with your homework or attend your games. Thanks for always having a word of encouragement, hugs and kisses. Your affection was important during this process. Lucila "Manina" Garza, my aunt and second mother, thank you for your love, gifts, and helping me clean my house. Thanks for all your prayers and for feeding me. To my extended family, aunts and cousins, thanks for all your love, support and encouragement.

My friend, Mario Alberto Ramirez - for always understanding me, listening to me, for the little gifts, emails , notes, and revisions, thank you. Thanks for all your support throughout all my college years. I learned so much from you. To my best friends Luz Zamora and Flor Lucio, I will be forever be grateful for all your words of encouragement and for believing in me. Thanks for stealing me away from long hours of writing. To the members of my church, thanks for all your prayers, meals and words of encouragement.

J.J. Garcia, my middle school coach, thank you for teaching me about determination, dedication and desire. I have never forgotten the three "Ds." These words kept me going throughout my life. In everything I do I always remember that I have to be determined, dedicated and have a big desire to do my very best and no less. Thanks for sacrificing your time from your own children to help, guide and love me as a father. You will always have a special place in my heart. Dr. Diana Ramirez, I am so grateful for all your support, ideas, questions and learning opportunities. Thank for sharing your experiences with me and for listening during my most difficult moments. You have always been a guide, inspiration and sister to me.

To my high school English teacher and friend, Donna Browne, thanks for all your help and kind words. You influenced my life since the first day I met you. I did not know what I wanted to study, but my senior in high school I knew I wanted to teach English, just like you. You have been an inspiration in my life, as a mother and a professional. I never understood what you saw in me, but you told me I had potential, and I believed you. Thank you for believing I could make a difference. You have been a guide and a role model. To my boss and friend, Mr. Jose Luis Poy, thank you for all your support and prayers. You and your family have always blessed my life in different ways. You and your wife have been an inspiration. Thanks for always believing in me and helping me during this process.

Aidee Vasquez, thank you for pushing me throughout the program and during the dissertation process. We had a lot of fun working on presentations and papers in the doctoral program. Through you, I learned to make good use of my time throughout these three years and to stay focused. To my classmates at UTB, Cohort 1, I learned so much from all of you that it is impossible to include everyone in the acknowledgements. Thanks for the study groups, meals, and good laughs we shared these three years. You became a family to me and I will never forget you. It was great being part of the first cohort. Thanks for always giving me a words of encouragement and for putting up with my silly comments.

My professors, I learned so much from all of you. Thanks for all your guidance, support, all the ways of learning, you shared with me throughout these years. To Dr. Bobbette Morgan thank you for working so hard in bringing the doctoral program to UTB. Thanks for believing in your students. Your kindness and support during this process were very important in helping me move forward throughout the program. Thanks for always

fighting on our behalf to get the best for us. Dr. Kerry McArthur, thank you for believing in me. All your candid words, revisions and encouragement helped me write and think. Dr. Janet Shefelbine, thanks for all your support before and during the doctoral program. I remember I asked you if you thought I should apply to the program and you said, "Of course, Norma, you are so resilient." These words gave me courage and valor to go forward and not doubt myself. Thanks for all the revisions and encouragement during the dissertation process.

Last but not least, to my chair, Dr. Audra Skukauskaite, I will forever be grateful. I could not have finished this work without your ongoing support, encouragement and patience. I learned so much from you. Thank you for pushing me to always do better. Thank you for your commitment to education and research . Your commitment to your profession has taught me to value what I do and to feel the responsibility to always give it my best. You taught me to believe in myself, to think, write, and do research. Thanks for not giving up on me, even when I did not want to move forward. You have a unique way of bringing the best in everyone. Thank you for devoting the countless hours of your time and even for sharing snacks, which kept me going through the multiple revisions.. You always knew how to make me work effectively. You were one of my biggest blessings during this doctoral program. Gracias!

This dissertation would have not been possible without the people around me who inspired, guided, supported and loved me. I am blessed by God to have all of you in my life. I just hope I can impact others the same way. May all the glory and honor be for my Lord and Savior. I was able to do all things through You who strengthened me during this journey.

Abstract

FIRST GENERATION HISPANIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GOING TO COLLEGE:

EXPERIENCES THAT SUPPORT STUDENT DECISIONS AND COLLEGE GOING

PATHWAYS

By

Norma Ibarra-Cantú

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

In this study I examined the question: How do first generation Hispanic high school

students decide to attend college? To understand how the students made college decisions

and what supported their pursuit of college aspirations, I interviewed six Hispanic high school

students from five different high schools in a south Texas-Mexico border town. Student

participants were the first generation in their immediate family to graduate from high school

and to consider going to college. I conducted qualitative open-ended interviews with each of

the participants and used inductive multilayered analyses to identify how students made

decisions to attend college and how they were able to continue their college aspirations with

the supports from families, schools, and community. I used the funds of knowledge and social

capital theoretical frameworks to make visible the ways students utilized different resources

and people's support to ensure the continuation of the college-going process.

Findings indicated that students' decision to go to college was a process and not a

moment in time. Students' college-going thoughts were kept alive by students creating

networks with families, school personnel and members of the community. Despite the

challenges students faced throughout their schooling experiences, they were able to learn from

the difficulties and utilize resources available to construct funds of knowledge and social capital for school and college success. Families supported students through talks about life experiences and the consequences of not attending college. Community members provided supports by listening and sharing professional or personal knowledge. Schools and school personnel promoted student college aspirations by talking to students and providing information about college.

When students can draw on the actions and supports of different members of society, they can envision and pursue college as a realistic option. In demonstrating the availability and the importance of multiple supports, this study calls for active college awareness and promotion on the part of all members of society. The more supports are available for first generation Hispanic high school students, the more likely they are to succeed in school and enter college, thus minimizing the "silent epidemic" of dropouts and minority underrepresentation in higher education.

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CHAPTER I

PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

The perspectives of first generation Hispanic students who have made the important decision to pursue higher education have much to offer educators, policy makers, and researchers. Study of student perspectives and experiences can lead to the understanding of how minority students can best be served by public schools and colleges. While statistics of Hispanic student underrepresentation in higher education are overwhelming (Miller, 2005; Smyth & Hattam, 2004), there is less research that examines student experiences and college-going decisions. By examining student perspectives about their decisions to go to college, this study seeks to reveal factors that influence student decisions to pursue postsecondary education.   Understanding the process it takes for first generation Hispanic students to make decisions about their futures may enable educators at high school levels to help all students envision college futures and gain access to college.

The purpose of this study was to explore factors that may have contributed to first-generation Hispanic high school students deciding to attend college despite constraints they may have faced in home, school and/or social contexts. My purpose was to gain insight into students' perspectives about how they start thinking as college-going students and how they continue on this pathway. The present study provides information about what helps first-generation Hispanic high school students succeed academically and decide to pursue higher education.

Personal Background

This dissertation is guided by my commitment to help students in my community to envision and accomplish goals that they may not be considering due to the social, economic, and academic constraints many face as first generation Hispanic students. My goal for this study was to learn from the experiences of adolescents in a South-Texas border town in order to better serve my community and to provide information for others who may be able to influence the lives and academic decisions of all adolescents, particularly those from minority and low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Like student participants in this study, I was born and live in a South-Texas border town which is plagued by poverty, low academic achievement, high student dropout rates, and low college enrollment. As a previous high school English teacher and currently as an assistant principal at an elementary school, I see many students fall through the cracks, become disillusioned with school, and give up on education and possibilities to change their own lives and community as a whole. While students from middle class families tend to succeed at higher rates and go to college, many of the adolescents I have talked to say they do not know enough about college to even imagine it as a possibility. They also often have other priorities, such as work and earning money to help the family. Many have told me they do not see how school or college can help them and their families.

I can identify with many of the struggles of my student participants. I am a first-generation Hispanic college student who came from a single-parent home and low socioeconomic status. My daily struggles with poverty, abuse, and familial dysfunctions, made school secondary in my life and I was among the low achieving students. However, my struggles also led me to decide that college would be the only pathway out of my current

situation. Once I realized that college may be important for my future, in school and community I gravitated toward people who were successful and who were willing to offer me the guidance necessary to proceed with my college aspirations.

Despite facing obstacles similar to those of the students participating in my study, I was able to graduate from high school and go to college. I obtained a bachelor's degree, started working in educational settings, and then continued toward a graduate degree. Obtaining a master's degree opened many doors for me in job opportunities and social possibilities. Many of my students and community members started looking at me as a role model and an inspiration because I had come from the background in which they lived. This responsibility, as well as my own unceasing desire for learning has pushed me to pursue a doctorate. My hope is that I can give back to my community and help students who, like me in the early years in school, cannot see college as a possibility.

In my over twenty years of work with children and adolescents in school and community settings, I have developed an interest in learning from the youth and in understanding their schooling experiences. I have shared my past experiences and they have shared theirs. Adolescents in school and out of school have been able to relate to me since they feel I am one of them. These shared backgrounds, conversations, and relationships bring with them a responsibility for me to listen to the students and to share their perspectives, in order to contribute to developing educational opportunities for many more first generation Hispanic high school students. In conducting the study which focuses on first generation Hispanic high school students' perspectives about their college going decisions and pathways, I seek to provide insights that may help other students like my participants envision and attain

college. In this way, I can contribute not only to my local community and its adolescents, but also to the larger educational scholarly community.

Statement of the Problem

The estimated 31.3 million Hispanic individuals in the United States now constitute one seventh of the total population. Hispanics are the country's largest and most rapidly-growing population living in practically every county in the country (Gottlieb, 2006). This means that the Hispanic population is growing at a rate of 3.6 % per year compared to the overall population growth rate of 1% (Millet & Nettles, 2006). Hispanics are officially the largest minority group in the United States with 38.8 million residents, as confirmed by the U.S. Census Bureau in June 2003 (Gottlieb, 2006). Given this growth of the Hispanic population, schools systems around the country are not prepared to address the needs of an increasingly culturally pluralistic student population (Martinez, DeGarmo, Eddy, 2004).

Hispanics in the United States face a dropout problem. In districts where Hispanic students are the majority, only 40% percent of students graduate from high school (Kozol, 2005). Researchers claim that the high dropout rate among Hispanic students is caused by the pressure of doing well on high stakes testing (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Mahon, 2006; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez Heilig, 2008). Minority students struggle with the high school exit exam more than their white peers (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Mahon, 2006), are often being "pushed out" of public education, and do not meet graduation requirements (Kimball, 2005;Glass, 2008; Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig & Heinrich, 2008; Murray, 2008). This high dropout rate among Hispanic students also contributes to their

underrepresentation in postsecondary education (Fry, 2003;Talbot & Kuehn, 2002; Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002).

In this study I addressed the challenges identified in the literature in multiple ways. By interviewing first generation Hispanic students who have indicated that they plan to go to college, documented the process students go through as they decide to attend college. I sought to identify factors that have helped first generation Hispanic students succeed in order to provide information needed for educators to build opportunities to help all high school students.

There is a gap in literature about high school first generation Hispanic high school students and how they decide to go to college. Most studies on first generation college-going students have surveyed college students (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Reid & Moore, 2008; Sanchez, Reyes & Singh, 2005; Saunders & Serna, 2004). The limited number of studies found on high school students who want to pursue college (Martinez et al., 2004) have been quantitative and have not been conducted with first generation Hispanic high school students.

First Generation Students

For the purpose of this study, first-generation students represent the group of students who are the first in their immediate family to decide to attend college. I examined college-going first generation Hispanic high school students' perspectives. Understanding their perspectives was important because first generation students represent a large segment of the college community (Inman & Mayes, 1999).

First generation Hispanic students are at a bigger disadvantage than other ethnic groups, especially when it comes to postsecondary education access. Reid & Moore (2008)

argue that first generation inclinations and decisions to pursue higher education are influenced by several factors such as educational expectations, academic preparation, support from parents and schools in planning and preparation for college, and family income.

There are differences between students who are the first in their immediate family to decide to go to college from those whose parents had attended college (Tym, McMillion, Barone & Webster, 2004;Choy, 2001). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2001) reports that what is known about college enrollment is that students who have parents who have completed college are more likely to follow their parents' academic footsteps. Students whose parents had college education enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation at an 89% rate. NCES (2001) also reports that students whose parents had less than a high school education enrolled at a rate of 36%. These statistics show that first generation students are faced with challenges and are at a disadvantage when considering higher education.

The demographics of first-generation students also differ from non-first generation students in age and family background (Richardson & Resendiz, 2006). Researchers argue that first generation students are older and have lower incomes compared to non-first generation students. Inman & Mayes (1999) studied a large sample of first generation community college students who had been admitted in college. They found that first generation college students typically come from poorer families and are less prepared. They also stated that first generation students lack academic and psychological preparation for higher education. Because of this lack of preparation, students have lower grade point averages. They also face other nonacademic challenges such as financial obligations.

Another characteristic of first generation students is that they are more likely to be female students who are not entering college immediately out of high school (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Inman & Mayes, 1999). Researchers also argue that first-generation students are geographically constrained and concerned with having a college close to home (Inman & Mayes, 1999).

These challenges and unique characteristics of being first indicate that administrators, curriculum planners, and recruiters must collaborate in order to address the needs of this diverse group of people (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Inman & Mayes, 1999).   Inman and Mayes (1999) argue that an understanding of first generation students will allow for more focused recruiting, program development, retention, and graduation efforts.

Underachievement of Hispanics in High Schools and Their Access to Higher Education

Hispanics are becoming an increasingly large percentage of the United States school-aged population. Despite the fact that this minority group is on the verge of becoming a majority group, they continue to display the lowest academic performance in the country (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Gandara & Bial, 2001). Researchers have argued that Hispanics have the lowest achievement levels and are the most undereducated (Gandara & Contreras, 2009) and underachieving (Valadez, 2008) racial group in the United States. Hispanics continue to be overrepresented in samples of families with at risk factors such as lack of academic progress and poor behavior (Martinez et al., 2004).

 Researchers contend that in the last three decades Hispanic students have failed to graduate from high school and have failed to show any progress in obtaining a college degree (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). However, this academic failure for Hispanic students is not a

random occurrence. Researchers have identified several factors which cause low achievement among Hispanic students. Students fail and drop out due to low achievement, dissatisfaction with school (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006), economic pressures (Richardson & Resendiz, 2006), and, for girls, early pregnancy (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Hispanic students are being held from succeeding in schools and pursuing a higher education (Flores, Navarro & DeWitz, 2008). Hispanic high school students are at risk for low achievement, which in turn restricts their opportunity for college careers (Lopez, 2001).

The dropout problem among Hispanic students and their underrepresentation in higher education merits the attention of all stakeholders. Because first generation Hispanic high school students face many obstacles, studies are needed to help educators, families and community members learn about ways to provide supports for students.

Purpose of the Study

Little is known about the specific factors that promote first-generation Hispanic high school students' success (Martinez et al., 2004). Researchers have traditionally focused on different indicators of high school performance such as test scores, dropout rates, and attrition rates (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Others have focused on the public educational system pushing students out of education (Nichols & Berliner, 2007) and on the underrepresentation of Hispanic students in postsecondary education (Talbot & Kuehn, 2002).

In order for educators, administrators, and parents to understand how students decide to pursue postsecondary education, more studies are needed on students' perspectives (Valadez, 2008). As Valadez (2008) points out, schools will be able to affect dropout

behavior when researchers are able to understand students' perspectives associated with their decisions to attend college.

The present study sought to identify specific factors that promote first generation Hispanic high school students' success. The study makes visible the experiences that support their decisions and college going pathways.

Research Design

In order to understand what may help first generation Hispanic high school students decide to go to college despite the sociocultural and socioeconomic constraints they may face, I developed a qualitative interview study. This is a qualitative interview study which sought to gain an emic perspective (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Green, Dixon, & Zaharlick, 2003; Spradley, 1979) on what helps first generation Hispanic high school students decide to go to college. I conducted qualitative, open-ended interviews with six Hispanic high school students attending four different high schools in a large South Texas-Mexico border town. Three students were male and three were female. All students were from low socioeconomic status homes and had self-identified as having made a decision to go to college.

I used open-ended interviews to give students opportunities to share their insight about their experiences and decisions that enabled them to embark on a college pathway. I conducted the interviews in settings of student choice and allowed students to initiate interview topics and lead the conversation. These open-ended interviews with each of the six students lasted about an hour. Interview records were transcribed using message units (Green & Wallat, 1981). These message units helped me to identify how through moment by moment interactions participants constructed representations of their decisions about college.

I used five levels of analysis to indentify topics students mentioned about their college decisions.

<center>Research Question</center>

The question guiding my study is: How do first-generation Hispanic high school students decide to go to college?

<center>Overview of Dissertation</center>

In the next chapter, I synthesize literature on supports and constraints high school students encounter throughout their schooling experiences. Through this literature I make visible what is known and point out the existing gap in the literature about students' college decisions and supports for students' success. Chapter three lays out the research design and methodology for the study. In this chapter, I discuss five levels of analysis used to develop an understanding of how students decide to go to college. In chapter four, I include a discussion of the data analyzed. Chapter five includes a discussion of the findings, directions for future research and implications for adolescents, families, school personnel and members of the community. I end the dissertation by describing the first steps I have taken to apply the findings from this study to my elementary school campus

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Researchers argue that it is imperative for all parents, educators and policymakers to come together to build supports for all minority students to achieve success academically (Flores et al., 2008; Mau & Mau, 2006). What is known is that Latino high school students are at risk for low achievement which in turn restricts their opportunity for college and careers (Lopez, 2001). Researchers have extensively relied on quantitative analyses to address the issue of minority groups being at risk and not achieving (Martinez et al., 2004; O'Conner et al., 2009). However, there is a gap within qualitative literature which focuses on first generation high school students deciding to go to college. While research has provided evidence that Hispanic students face difficulties succeeding in school, little is known from students' point of view about the specific factors that promote and hinder their success in high school (Martinez et al., 2004).

In seeking to understand the experiences of Hispanic students in schools I synthesize literature on supports and constraints high students encounter in their access to higher education. Then I present the theoretical framework for my study. This chapter makes visible what is known about how Hispanic high school students decide to go to college. I also discuss the existing gap in studying what first generation Hispanic high school students consider supports which influence their college-going aspirations.

Reviewed literature includes studies about constraints and supports available for high school students. The constraints in schools vary from deficit cultural models to current policies which offer no support for Hispanic first generation high school students. Other

constrains include the lack of resources and low expectations set by educators. The literature reviewed also encompasses supports Hispanic students are receiving in schools. Some supports discussed in the literature are mentoring and college readiness programs available for high school students, which includes funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986).

In this review of the literature about high school students, I first review what researchers argue are constraints high school students face. Then I review supports available in high school for students to help them in their schooling experiences. At the end of the chapter I present the theoretical framework for this study.

Constraint One: Deficit Cultural Model

One constraint high school students face in their aspirations to go to college is that many educators do not believe minority students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds can succeed. The theory that genetic or cultural inferiority is the cause of academic failure has been prevalent in the United States (Nieto & Bode, 2008). This theory is what Nieto & Bode (2008) identify as the deficit thinking model. Researchers argue that deficit thinking is "deeply embedded in educational thought and practice and that it pervades schools that serve children from low-income homes and children of color" (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004, p. 52). Nieto & Bode (2008) state that the deficit model places complete responsibility for children's failure on their homes and families, effectively absolving schools and society from responsibility. The deficit model has been used to explain failure in schools and to blame the victim (Ramirez, 2002). This deficit thinking is what many educators lean

on to allege that students fail because the weight of familial deficits and dysfunctions is too great (Nieto, 1999; Nieto & Bode, 2008).

Deficit theories focus on conditions that are outside the control of the school personnel and the students. These theories foster despair because they suggest that students' problems are predetermined and that there is no hope for changing the circumstances that produce those problems (Nieto & Bode, 2008). In public schools minority students and low socioeconomic background are often overlooked and do not get considered for college, preparatory classes. Moreover, school policies and practices add to the constraints students face throughout their schooling experiences.

Constraint Two: "Pushout" Policies

Factors contributing to the largely negative environment for Hispanic students nationwide are high stakes testing and grade retention (Kimball, 2005; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; McNeil et al., 2008; Mahon, 2006). Students are targeted by school personnel when they do not to pass the state examination. Consequently, this creates a negative learning environment for Hispanic students, leading to increasing dropouts. Kimball (2005) argues that one of the reasons Hispanic students are not succeeding in school and are dropping out is due to the "pushout" policies and behavior of school administrators and teachers. Educators, in their desperate search to meet exemplary status for their schools, reject these students, do not provide the additional supports that may help the students succeed, which often results in the students dropping out (Kimball, 2005). Rumberger and Palardy (2005) state that schools area aware that standardized test scores can improve if the number of students who drop out

increases because dropouts have low test scores. For the sake of increasing school test score rating, schools push out students who are underperforming, usually the minority students.

High stakes testing also contributes to the push-out policies because tests that are culturally biased disadvantage minority students (Walpole, McDonough, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi & Toliver, 2005; Skrla & Scheurich, 2004; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Mahon, 2006). Scholars argue that African American and Hispanic students tend to have lower scores on standardized tests because of cultural bias inherent in the tests (Walpole et al., 2005). Given the widespread use of national and state standardized tests that are culturally biased, minority groups are at a bigger disadvantage and are set up for failure (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Because of these lower test scores and other factors minority students are be pushed out of school (Walepole et al., 2005) and from more rigorous academic classes such as advanced placement and dual enrollment courses. Consequently, minority students are less likely to pursue postsecondary education (Walepole et al., 2005).

In Texas, schools focus on increasing results on mandated state tests. Kimball (2005) claims that the pressure of increasing test results causes teachers and administrators to retain students for not passing high stakes tests. He reports that in Houston in 2005, over 20,000 Latino students were retained in the 9th grade for up to three years for not passing a standardized test. Statistics indicate that students have a 50 % chance of dropping out if they are retained one year and 90% if they are retained two years (Kimball, 2005). 35% of the high school dropout respondents in the Bridgeland's et al. (2006) study attest leaving school because of "failing school" and 32% stated that they were required to repeat a grade. Researchers have identified high stakes testing, culturally biased tests and retention as "push-out" policies which contribute to the dropout problem (Kimball, 2005). These push-out

policies make visible the need to study what keeps Hispanic high school students in school and helps them decide to go to college despite the pressures they face in schools.

Constraint Three: Lack of Resources

An additional factor that influences dropout rates identified in the literature is the inadequacy of resources to promote and support student success in schools. Hispanic students are more likely than their counterparts to attend urban schools that are resource poor, to be taught by less qualified teachers, to have teachers with lower expectations, and to be tracked away from higher achieving groups (Kozol, 2005; Walpole, et al., 2005). Students are placed at a disadvantage when experienced teachers are more likely to teach the privileged children than the poor (Kozol, 2005). Kozol (2005) argues further that privileged children are receiving a better education and get richer academically and unprivileged children get poorer (academically) by receiving rote learning. He claims this practice to be a segregated school system for minority groups.

Walepole et al. (2005) similarly argue that Hispanic high school students lack test preparation skills, college information, and resources to pay for college admission tests. Students often times lack the monetary and academic resources necessary for both college admission and sustainability of enrollment. College admission tests are obstacles that prevent high school students from becoming participants in higher education.

The literature reviewed also makes visible that student lack of interest in classes and classroom assignments is a constraint faced by high school students. Bridgeland et al. (2006) conducted surveys of young people aged sixteen through twenty -five years-of age who identified themselves as high school dropouts. 47% percent of the participants in the

Bridgeland et al. (2006) study stated that the major reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting and 69% said that they were not motivated or inspired to work. Researchers argued that their disengagement was caused by the rote instruction and lack of adequate resources (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Some rote learning included teachers coaching students to pass standardized test by using prepackaged lessons (Kozol, 2005). This practice did not engage students in meaningful learning and one of the results was that students dropped out (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Delpit, 2006; Kozol, 2005).

The literature reviewed shows that high school students face constraints which are created by the schooling system and educational policies. Hispanic high school students do not complete high school because educators continue to stereotype minority groups and allege that their failure is a consequence of their dysfunction or deficit. Current policies also hinder students' academic achievement. Minority students are dropping out because they are low achieving in comparison to majority groups. Minority students also lack resources and experienced teachers. However, researchers also make visible supports minority students have despite the constraints they face throughout their schooling experiences. The supports are reviewed in the next section.

Supports for Minority High School Students

In looking at what has limited and restricted students' education, scholars identify ways to support student success and prevent dropout. Research indicates that mentoring and high school college preparation programs are two effective ways to support minority high school students (De La Cruz, 2008; Roberts 2007; Lopez & Salas, 2006; Saunders & Serna, 2004).

Support One: Mentoring

Mentoring has been identified as a key factor in facilitating Hispanic students' engagement and success in school (De La Cruz, 2008). Roberts (2007) defines a mentor as a more skilled and experienced person who is active and dynamic supporting and guiding a mentee a person who receives support and guidance from an experienced person. According to Roberts (2007), many youth will not gain skills or succeed without personal attention to their individual growth needs provided by a mentor.

> Mentoring relationships are considered to be beneficial in promoting competence and providing self-assurance and support in the face of new situations. If mentors engage in activities with adolescents that expand competence, encourage them to engage in other such activities, and extend the range of people with whom they interact, then they should have a positive impact on adolescent's development (Roberts, 2007, p. 11).

De La Cruz (2008) claims that Latino students need mentors who take a special and unique interest in their success. De La Cruz (2008) and Vivian (2005) report how mentoring has led to significantly improved outcomes in students who are enrolled in higher educational settings. Four types of mentoring were common to all the respondents (De La Cruz, 2008). The most critical and valuable support was the family. The next most important type of mentoring mentioned by the participants was mentoring of an advisor who was not a formal academic advisor. The third type of motivation was students' self-motivation and determination. Students also identified peers with the same ethnic and language background as mentors who offered support and solidarity during difficult situations. In her study De La

Cruz (2008) observed that strong mentoring relationships produce successful outcomes for students who have previously felt rejected by society because they were from a minority group.

Lopez and Salas (2006) also report Latino students perceiving individuals' supportive actions as an important variable for academic success. These researchers demonstrate that the different kinds of social supports received by the participants helped them cope with school tensions and provided physical and instrumental assistance, attitude transmission, resource and information sharing and emotional and psychological support (Lopez & Salas, 2006). Lopez (2001) also found that Hispanic high school students who do well academically and in their careers achieved this success through different kinds of guidance in their lives, including from families, teachers, and programs designed to enhance educational success.

Support Two: College Readiness Programs Available for High School Students

Researchers claim that students who are enrolled in college readiness programs have been academically successful (Watt, Powell & Mendiola, 2004). Watt et al., 2004 report that college readiness is one of seven national education priorities (U. S. Department of Education, 2000). The most recent reauthorization of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 holds states accountable for improving educational performance for disaggregated subgroups of students (Watt, Powell & Mendiola, 2004; Watt ,Powell, Mendiola & Cossio, 2006;Watt, Huerta &Lozano, 2007). High schools have implemented different models of college readiness programs in order to improve student academic performance.

With intent of preparing at risk low income minority students for college, schools have implemented various college readiness programs such as Advancement via Individual

Determination (AVID) (Watt et al., 2004; Watt et al., 2006;Watt et al., 2007) and GEAR UP.

GEAR UP is a school centered program meant to improve study habits, smooth the transition

from high school to college, and increase academic achievement and options of high school

students (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). AVID however is a student centered program which

claims success in the areas of high school graduation, increased academic achievement, and

college attendance rates (Watt et al., 2004; Watt et al., 2006; Watt et al., 2007).

Additionally, studies conducted on AVID show that schools and their districts who

have implemented this model have improved in enrollment of students in advanced course

work leading to college matriculation. This gain was measured over four years of AVID

implementation. Their non-AVID comparison schools and districts did not show similar

improvements (Watt et al., 2006). Watt et al. (2006) state that AVID can leverage the profile

of the entire school including non-White and low-income students. In these studies AVID

programs were a support to students regardless of demographic subgroup. AVID students

were also successful in completing high school and moved through a college admission

process.

The Future Program is another model used to help minority students transition to

college. Sunders & Serna (2004) investigated The Future Program which sought to assist

underrepresented youth in the development and accrual of the social capital necessary to

apply, enroll and succeed in college. Sunders & Serna (2004) conducted a longitudinal study

of ten Hispanic students who participated in the Future Program . By analyzing qualitative

interviews researchers found ways in which students engaged in the Future Program,

Saunders & Serna (2004) demonstrated the ability of first-generation Hispanic college

students to create, negotiate and sustain social networks which influence student college

experience. In this study the participants were able to attend college by using their old

networks and creating new ones in college. One of the findings from qualitative interviews

attested to student emphasis on the need for caring and nurturing relationships between

students and knowledgeable adults. Sunders & Serna (2004) argue that other researchers have

neglected to investigate how intervention programs can help Hispanic students succeed,

remain in school through graduation, and enter college. Therefore, this study seeks to

understand what Hispanic high school students consider as supports which have helped them

decide to go to college.

Gap in the Literature

Through synthesizing the literature I have found an existing gap. There is very little

qualitative research available on Hispanics high school students and their pathways toward

college. Most of the studies done on Hispanic high school students are quantitative. These

studies have surveyed large numbers of students and have identified factors which support

and/or constrain student success in school. In addition, there is no literature on first-

generation Hispanic high school students and how they decide they want to go to college.

Most studies on first-generation students are about college students.

Literature indicates that the Hispanic students are not being successful in the

educational system. However, "educational failure is an issue too complex and knotty to be

fixed by any single program or approach" (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p.5). The factors that support

and/or constraint Hispanic high school students'graduation merit immediate attention from all

educators, policymakers, and communities across the United States. The dropout problem is

well-known by all stakeholders; however, the only way it will diminish is to stand up against this epidemic (Bridgeland et al., 2006) and become proactive in supports for minority students instead of reinforcing the academic constraints they already face. Creating supports, such as mentoring and college readiness programs for Hispanic students is necessary to prevent the current massive failure in public schools (Nieto & Bode, 2008). It is important to understand perspectives of first generation Hispanic high school students who have decided to attend college. Their perspectives may help educators provide support for high school students early in school, thus preventing dropout and encouraging college aspirations for more first generation, Hispanic students.

Theoretical Framework

In examining how a group of first-generation Hispanic high school students decide they want to go to college, this study draws on the theory of funds of knowledge to explore how the students were able to use cultural resources and to identify which cultural resources influenced students' decisions about going to college. This study also situates the experiences of first generation Hispanic college-going students within a social capital theory in order to make visible the social resources available for them. Through this study I also identify which supports helped students obtain the awareness to decide to go to college.

Funds of Knowledge Theory

Funds of knowledge are defined by Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) as the household's most useful cultural resources and as an essential tool kit that households need to maintain their well-being. Gonzalez et al. (2005) emphasize that funds of knowledge are

generated through the social and labor history of families and are communicated to others through the activities that constitute household life, including through the formation of social networks that are central to any household's functioning within its particular environment. The funds of knowledge may connect school and community when working-class Hispanic students' households are seen by administrators, teachers, parents, and the community as being rich in funds.

Gonzalez et al. (2005) argue for the importance of using the learners' community as a resource in bringing educational change and improvement and for creating social-cultural practices for authentic literacy practices. Social-cultural practices can be introduced into the classroom when educators conduct active research and learn that minority children and their families of the working-class also have ample resources that can benefit students in educational setting (Gonzalez et al., 2005). These resources ,or what Gonzalez et al. (2005) call "funds of knowledge," are a viable source for bridging the gap between school and community. Gonzalez et al. (2005) argue against schools focusing on what Hispanics students lack in the forms of language and knowledge sanctioned by schools. Instead, advocates of the funds of knowledge call for educators to focus on what knowledge and resources learners bring from home (Gonzalez et al., 2005). One suggestion Gonzalez, et al. (2005) offer for school personnel is to make home visits in which the focus is on the information students are able to bring to school. As a result of the home visits teachers would be able to formulate curriculum units that tap into the resources and household funds of knowledge students bring to school. Gonzalez et al. (2006) argue that if teachers develop a community of learners where funds of knowledge are identified, then teachers will be able to

offer students a format of instruction to think, reflect, and analyze with others and help students produce the knowledge necessary to become successful in school.

Drawing on the theory of the funds of knowledge, this study seeks to make visible the funds of knowledge high school students bring into the educational setting and develop in order to pursue their decision to go to college. Eliciting student responses about the knowledge they bring from home and about their social networks, this study seeks to identify what supports minority students.

Social Capital Theory

A social capital framework is also used in this study to understand first-generation Hispanic students' experiences which have helped them become college-going high school students. Social capital theorists (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Grodsky & Rieyle-Crumb, 2010) emphasize the importance of social networks which are available for individuals in order to gain knowledge. The theory calls for examining social connections students establish with teachers, peers, counselors, parents, mentors, and school officials, and how those connections influence student academic success. According to Valenzuela (1999), positive social relations at school are highly productive because they allow for the accumulation of social capital that can then be converted into socially valued resources or opportunities (e.g., good grades, a high school diploma, access to privileged information, etc.). Social capital theory enables looking at the social capital adolescents acquire throughout their high school, allowing them to consider college careers after graduation.

Social capital theory has been used to study the socialization of racial minority children and youths, particularly African American and Hispanic youth from economically

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deprived urban communities (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, Vazquez & Mehan, 1995). Stanton-Salazar (1997) examines the role that relationships between youth and institutional agents, such as teachers and counselors, play in the greater multicultural context in which working-class minority youth live. He (1997) offers a framework on how some working class minority youth are able to manage their difficulty in participating in multiple worlds, how they develop cultural strategies for overcoming various obstacles, and how they manage to develop sustained and supportive relationships with institutional agents. Using this theory enables me to focus on social relations, resources and other factors that have influenced Hispanic students' decisions to go to college. I analyzed what students say about the experiences that have shaped their college-going decisions.

The theoretical lenses of funds of knowledge and social capital theories enable me to investigate what Hispanic students do to overcome constraints faced throughout their high school years and how they use their cultural knowledge and social capital to make adjustments in their social, personal and emotional, and academic experiences. This study answers the overarching question: How do first generation Hispanic High school students decide they want to attend college? To answer this question I conducted a qualitative study using interviewing as a primary data collection method to understand the cultural, social and intellectual resources available to and constructed by first-generation Hispanic high school students as they make decision to pursue college.

In this chapter I have synthesized literature on supports and constraints available to high school students. I have also made visible the current gap in the literature on the topic of first generation Hispanic high school students and their decisions to go to college. The

theoretical lenses (funds of knowledge and social capital theories) used in this study were also

discussed. In the next chapter, I discuss the research design and methodology used in this

study. I also discuss the process in the collection of data. I end the chapter with five levels of

analysis I used to analyze open-ended interviews.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

In chapter one I have discussed that the high dropout rate affects young people who are low-income and a minority (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The consequences of high dropout rates are that first-generation Hispanic students are underrepresented in colleges and universities (Martinez et al., 2004; Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002). Researchers such as Rumberger and Palardy (2005), have sought to explain how schools become effective in improving students' performance in schools and their post secondary access. Inman and Mayes (1999) have argued that understanding first-generation students will allow for developing more focused supports available to students. In chapter two, I discussed literature on supports and constraints Hispanic students face throughout their schooling experiences. Constraints include the deficit cultural model, "push-out policies" and lack of resources. Literature on first-generation students is focused on first-generation college students and not on high school students (Sanchez et al., 2005; Reid & Moore, 2008; Inman & Mayes, 1999). Additionally, most literature available on support for students uses quantitative methodology (Martinez et al., 2004; Talbot & Kuehn, 2002; Watt et al., 2006), focuses on supports available for college students (Saunders & Serna, 2004; Sanchez et al., 2005; De la Cruz, 2008;Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002), or focuses on high school immigrant students (Valadez, 2008).

The purpose of this qualitative open-ended interview study was to examine the question: How do first-generation Hispanic high school students decide to attend college? In

seeking to understand students' academic and social experiences related to college decisions, I used open-ended interviews with six high school students. In analyzing the interviews, I sought to identify supports in their lives and how they became college-going students. I examined how students' prior experiences shaped their post-secondary educational decisions and how these decisions were ongoing through their schooling experiences. In this chapter I discuss the research approach used in this study.

Research Approach

This research study is a qualitative interview study. Scholars (e.g., Merriam, 2009) have conceptualized qualitative research as an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques. Patton (2002) explains that qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in a particular context. The goal of a qualitative researcher "is to better understand human behavior and experiences and to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and describe those meanings" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 43). In order to accomplish this goal, the purpose of my study was to gain an emic perspective (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Green, Dixon & Zaharlick, 2003; Spradley, 1979) of how students decided to go to college and how they maintained their college-going aspirations. I examined students' experiences and gained insight on how they decided to go to college through open-ended interviews.

The most commonly used method of data collection in qualitative research is the qualitative research interview (King & Horrocks, 2010). Atkinson & Silverman (1997) define interviews as a social technique for the public construction of self. Qualitative methods ranging from participant observation to interviews to discourse analysis have become key

methods of social research. Some researchers argue that interviewing is only a tool in qualitative research and not a method. However, more recently scholars have argued that interviewing is theoretically grounded and needs to be conceptualized as a method in its own right (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009;Kvale, 1996). Qualitative interviewing is used to find out things which can not directly be observed (Patton, 2002). Gubrium & Holstein (2003) argue that interviews generate data on their own and generate accounts and performances that have their own properties. They further explain that through these interviews "informants construct themselves and others as particular kinds of moral agents" (p. 116). Thus, interviews become ways of capturing shared cultural understandings and enactments of the social world (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003).

I collected data through open ended interviews. I examined through qualitative open-ended interviews what high school students said about their school experiences and social contexts and how these experiences shaped their decisions to pursue postsecondary education. Open ended interviews allowed me to engage in extended conversations (Skukauskaite, 2006) around the topic of going to college. I used open-ended interviews to give the students an opportunity to respond in their own words and to express their personal perspectives (Patton, 2002) about their college going decisions.

Methodology

Setting

A large border town in South Texas was selected for the study. The majority of the population living in this area is of Hispanic origin and low social economic status (TEA 2009). Many of the high school students in this border town drop out and do not attend

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college (Kimball, 2005). Dropping out is an acute problem in South Texas, where 24.3 % of adults are not high school completers.

The South Texas Region consists of four counties, Starr , Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron. According to the Texas Higher Coordinating Board, Higher Education Quick Facts (2008) and the U.S. Census (2002) the South Texas region is slightly below the statewide average in percentage of 7th graders who continued to 9th grade, graduated from high school, and matriculated to higher education. Richardson & Resendiz (2006) report that 19.8 % of the adult population in South Texas border towns with Mexico towns have not completed high school. This region has students who are less likely than average to complete a college degree or certificate.

The South Texas Region serves Hispanic students who are more likely to be economically disadvantaged than other ethnicities (Richardson & Resendiz, 2006). The percentage of low-socioeconomic students in public schools is 98% (TEA, 2009). Researchers report that economic pressures and other problems contribute to the high dropout rate in South Texas (Richardson & Resendiz, 2006).

In addition to economic pressures and dropout issues in the South Texas Region, the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA, 2010) reported high student attrition rates. Attrition and dropout rates are reported in the IDRA (2010) *Secondary School Completion and Dropout Rates* report. An attrition rate is composed of students who left school for unidentified reasons not reported to the Texas Education Agency, while the dropout rates represent students who are coded in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) as leaving school and not enrolling in any other academic institution. The counties in the South Texas region report high attrition rates. In Starr County

in 2009-2010 the attrition rate was 37%. The Hidalgo County reported a 20% Hispanic

attrition rate and Willacy County reported 19%. My study took place in the Cameron County,

which reported a 44% Hispanic attrition rate. The average attrition rates reported for the

South Texas Region by IDRA (2010) is 37%. These statistics indicate that minority students

in regions where they are a majority are leaving school, drop out, and are not achieving

academically.

TEA also reports high rates of Hispanic students dropping out of school in the South

Texas counties. In 2009 TEA reported that Cameron County had a 9.4% dropout rate and a

76.8% graduation rate. A 9% dropout rate and 82.6% graduation rate was reported for Starr

county while Hidalgo county had a 12% dropout rate and 73.5% graduation rate (TEA, 2010).

The dropout rate for Willacy County as reported by TEA (2010) was 10.5% and a graduation

rate 75%. The statistics indicate that even though Hispanic students are the majority in the

South Texas region, Hispanic high school students are facing barriers to complete high school

and pursue a postsecondary degree.

The study took place in Border School District. Participants selected for the study

attended Ramirez High School, Lucas High School, Petersen High School, and Heights High

School (see Table 3.1). Ramirez High School has an approximate enrollment of 2,211

students. The enrollment includes 99% Hispanic, 5% white and 5% other. Lucas High

School has an approximate enrollment of 2,248 students which includes 99 % Hispanic, 1 %

White, 0 % other. Petersen High School has 97% Hispanic, .2 % white and 4% other.

Heights High School has 95 % Hispanic, 3% white and 2% other. In the subsequent section, I

include information about my participants and their selection.

The participants selected to be interviewed for this study met the following criteria: 1) Hispanic, 2) first to graduate from high school in their immediate family, 3) perceive themselves as college-going students. I identified participants by personal knowledge of their academic goals and by other people's references and snowball sampling. I interviewed six high school students from four different high schools. The participants and their schools were given pseudonyms to protect students' privacy and confidentiality. Participants selected their pseudonyms. In table 3.1 I have provided information about participants including names, grade, age, school they attend, interview setting and the relationship with the researcher.

Table 3.1

Student Profiles

Participant	Grade level	Age	School	Interview setting	Relationship with researcher
Dahvit	12	18	Ramirez High School	Church	Sunday school student
Karo	12	17	Ramirez High School	Church	Sunday school student
Kike	12	18	Lucas High School	His Church	Former high school student
Angel	10	16	Ramirez High school	Church	Sunday school student
Andres	9	15	Petersen High School	Church	Former Sunday school student
Maria	9	14	Heights High School	Participant's home	None

I personally knew five participants. Three participants, as indicated in Table 3.1, were members of the youth group in my church. Kike was a former student. Maria was the only student I did not know. Her mother had talked to me about her daughter and informed me of her interest to go to college. Because I knew most of the participants, my challenge was to bracket my insights and focus on what students said in the interview. I member checked my findings with the participants. I have included more information about each student in the following section titled "Student Profiles."

Student Profiles

Dahvit is a senior at Ramirez High School. He is a first-generation college-going high school student. He is the youngest of three sons. He lives with his mother, four nieces and one nephew. He is from a single parent home. Dahvit stated in his interview that his mother struggles to provide financially for him, his nieces and nephews. Dahvit's mother is a home provider and works outside the home15 hours a week. He is a drum major and is in the first semester of a four-year university. Dahvit is not only a first generation student from his family to attend college, but he is also first generation high school graduate and first generation studying in the United States. Dahvit is interested in a music career and would like to become a high school band director. He talked about music as his passion. Dahvit's band director and his wife a school counselor have guided Dahvit and even talked to some people from the university to help him get a scholarship. When I asked him what helps him move forward, he mentioned God. He says he knows God has something better for him but that he has to work for it. He says that going to college is like a huge step breaking ground for him and his family.

Karo is a senior at Ramirez High School. She is a first generation college-going student. She is the youngest daughter of two children in the household. She is from a single-parent home. She lives with her mother and brother. Her mother works as a housekeeper. Karo stated that it is difficult for her mother to provide for the family. Karo is a member of the dance team of the school and wants to attend a four-year university. Karo will be the first member of her family to graduate from high school in the United States. Karo is interested in math and would like to become an engineer. She said she has always excelled in the area of mathematics. She says she likes school and that math is easy for her. She is currently looking for scholarships. She says she knows for a fact she will be accepted to any university because she is top five percent of her class.

Angel is a sophomore at Ramirez High School. She is the oldest of three siblings. She has lived with her grandmother since birth. Her grandmother is unable to work. She stated that her grandmother gets government assistance. Angel's siblings live with her mother in a different city. Angel selected Ramirez High School because she got accepted into the magnet program for business and because this high school closer to home. She plays basketball, and participates in track, and is a member of student trainer team. Angel would like to attend a four-year university. She is a first generation student wanting to attend college. She would be the first to graduate from high school because her mother, aunts and uncles dropped out. She wants to go to college to help her grandmother financially. She is interested in becoming a teacher or a student trainer. She struggles with keeping up with her grades.

Maria is a freshman at Heights High School. She attends this school because she was accepted to the medical program. She is the oldest child of three. She lives with her father and mother. Her mother is a housewife and her father is a truck driver. She said she sees her

father once a month. Maria is also a first-generation student who has decided to attend college. Maria's mother gives her information about school because she is a parent volunteer. Maria is taking advanced placement and dual enrollment classes to get her prepared for college. Her mother and her counselor told her about dual enrollment classes in high school. Maria receives emotional and social support from her mother and an aunt.

Andres is a sophomore at Petersen High School. He is a soccer player. He lives with his mother and brother. His father is in prison. His mother is the only provider and works at a shopping center. Andres stated that they get government assistance. He is a first-generation student who has decided to attend college. He will also be first generation graduating from high school. Andres wants to be an engineer and obtain a master's and doctorate degree someday. He says God has helped him stay focused. He is enrolled in advanced placement courses. He receives encouragement from his mother and a church group.

Kike is a senior at Lucas High School. Kike is the oldest of three children. He lives with his mother and father and two brothers. His father works in construction and his mother is a house wife. Prior to working in construction, Kike's father and mother worked in the fields. Therefore Kike was labeled in school as a migrant student. He is the first-generation student who will graduate from high school and has decided to attend college. Kike has been accepted at an out-of-state university and will pursue a career in law enforcement.   In school he received support and guidance from his migrant teacher. As a migrant student he received school supplies and was assigned a teacher who helped him apply for a scholarship. He also receives support from a youth leader at his church.

All student participants were able to share their schooling experiences in extensive detail because they knew me personally. My relationship with the participants allowed me to gain an emic perspective about students' insights.

I followed ethical guidelines with all my participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). All participants signed an informed consent form. I informed all participants about the overall purpose of the investigation and main features of the design and the confidentiality of records. I obtained voluntary participation in the research project. I also informed them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. For those participants who were under the age of eighteen, parents were also informed about the study and voluntarily signed consent in their native language. Parents were informed of their right to withdraw their son/daughter from the study at any time. I was able to gain access (King & Horrocks, 2010) to participants because I had worked with them before. In working with adolescents I was able to engage in conversations with students and become an active listener.

Role of the researcher

Building rapport with the participants is a key ingredient in successful qualitative interviewing (King & Harrocks, 2010). My participants trusted me and felt comfortable conversing with me because I personally knew them. Five out of the six participants knew me personally (see table 3.1). I was Dahvit's, Karo's, Angel's and Andres' Sunday school teacher. Kike was a former student in high school. I was able to gain access to information and details about their college decisions because participants felt comfortable sharing their feelings about their experiences and thoughts about college aspirations.

The students who participated in the study were the only high school students I had in the youth group, which includes middle, high school, and college students. Dahvit, Karo and Angel are currently members of the church youth group I work with. Andres is Dahvit's cousin and previously had been part of my youth group. Andres is currently attending another church closer to his home. Kike is a former student I taught three years ago at the high school. Maria is the only student I did not know before the interview. I know Maria's mother because she is a parent volunteer at an elementary school. I approached this parent because in previous conversations she had told me she had a daughter in high school. The relationship I had with Maria's mother and the experience I have working with adolescents helped me build rapport with Maria in order to conduct a successful interview.

My experience working with children and adolescents was instrumental in selecting the participants and the topic for this research study. Personal reflexivity is important to consider in order to the identify ways in which my beliefs, interest, experiences and identities impacted my research study (King & Harrocks, 2010). I taught high school for ten years and prior to teaching high school I was an instructional assistant at the same high school for two years. I have volunteered as a youth leader in church since I was thirteen years old. Currently, I am an administrator at an elementary school. My personal interest in helping students has derived from working with children and adolescents at schools and churches. I have seen the difficulties they face and was intended to find out how they have become resilient to continue moving forward toward their aspirations.

Data Collection

I collected data by audio recording face-to-face, open-ended interviews (Patton, 2002).

As a good practice (King & Horrocks , 2010), the physical space of the interviews was

selected by the participants. I decide to have students choose the setting because as King &

Horrocks (2010) argue the space in which the interview takes place can have a strong

influence on how it proceeds. The setting can help in producing physical and psychological

comfort and privacy. In Table 3.1, introduced in the "Student Profiles" section of this

chapter, I had included information about the setting in which each interview took place. Five

students selected the church as the setting. Maria chose to be interviewed at her home. The

setting influenced students' responses. Most students who chose to be interviewed at the

church made reference to church personnel or God.

My first interviewee, Dahvit, chose to be interviewed at church after a Sunday night

service as we both shared a meal. I used a digital recorder. I tried to take some notes as Dahvit

was talking, but I noticed he would stop talking and wait until I was done taking notes. King

& Horrocks (2010) explain that taking notes in an interview are important when the

interviewee refuses audio-recording. Given Dahvit's reaction to my note taking, I chose not to

take notes. Transcribing this first interview was a challenge because of the noise level. I met

with Dahvit to clarify some words and phrases after I had transcribed his interview. To avoid

audio difficulties, I used a video camera for the rest of my interviews because upon testing the

equipment, I found the audio quality on the video camera to be clearer than on the audio

recorder. The video also enabled me to use nonverbal and verbal contextualization cues

(Gumperz, 1992) to construct transcripts at the message unit level. Before I started my

interviews, I explained to each of my participants that I was going to use the video camera to

audio record the interview but I was not going to analyze the video images. I explained the

reasons for using the video camera and they all agreed to participate in the interview. Using

an HDD Panasonic Recording camera allowed me to download each interview to my

computer. I was able to see how long each interview was, write the time as I transcribed, and

locate a particular section.

I created an interview guide (see Table 3.2) which allowed flexibility during the

interview with each participant. I did not have a fixed schedule with fixed questions. Kvale

(1996) states that interview guides indicate and shape the topics in the interview. Flexibility

is a key requirement of qualitative interviewing. The interviewer must be able to respond to

topics that emerge during the interview (Kings & Horrocks, 2010).

King & Horrocks (2010) explain that some interviews may be difficult because

interviewees say too little or too much. As a former high school teacher, I know that not all

students feel comfortable when they are interviewed or when they have to talk to an adult.

Others might go off topic. Therefore, the questions were dynamic questions. Kvale (1996)

defines dynamic questions as those which are easy to understand, short and do not require

academic language. I used these types of questions to promote positive interactions and to

keep the flow of the conversation with the students.

I used the six types of questions discussed by King and Horrocks (2010), to guide me

in creating my interview guide. King and Horrocks (2010) six types of questions include:

background, experience, opinion, feeling, knowledge and sensory questions. Including

different types of questions is helpful to what different kinds of responses and to help

facilitate the responses (King & Horrocks, 2010). The twelve questions in the interview guide

(Table 3.2) were my guideposts. The right hand side column of Table 3.2 represents the kinds

of questions I asked based on King & Horrock's (2010) classification. However, in the interviews I did not always use all the questions and allowed students to introduce topics they considered relevant to our overall focus on college-going decisions. Once the interviewee and I engaged in a conversation, I asked the questions in the interview guide in different order depending on how each interviewee responded or conversed.

Table 3.2

Interview Guide

	Questions	Types of questions
1.	Please tell me about yourself	Background
2.	Can you tell me about your high school experience?	Experience
3.	What helps you succeed?	Experience
4.	There are many kids in similar situations to yours who drop out and do not graduate from school. Tell me about what helps you stay in school and succeed?	Experience
5.	How did you decide you wanted to go to college?	Experience
6.	Tell me about the first time you thought about attending college?	Experience
7.	What obstacles have you faced in succeeding in school and deciding to go to college? What helps you persevere?	Experience
8.	Are there times when you feel like giving up?	Feeling
9.	Tell me about those times. What do you think causes those moments?	Feeling
10.	What keeps you going and focused on wanting to go to college?	Opinion
11.	Is there anything or anyone at school, home, or in other settings such as clubs or church groups that keeps you focused and	Experience

motivated on going to college? Tell me about it.

12.   Is there anything you may want to add that I didn't ask about?   Opinion

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The interview guide included background and demographic questions (question 1 in Table 3.2). I usually started the interview with the first question because it gave students the opportunity to talk about anything important about them. I asked experience questions (questions 2,3,4,5,6,7 and 11). These questions focused on actions and experiences. Question 10 is opinion question. Through this question students were asked how their thoughts related to their goals and intentions to go to college. I included feeling questions in this interview guide (questions 8 & 9). These questions focused on participants' emotional experiences.

A qualitative perspective allowed me to make visible the topics of personal experiences and schooling experiences as described by the high school students in qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews enabled me to uncover not only the meanings inscribed in the participants' talk, but also to situate those meanings in the larger social and educational contexts of the participants' lives.

Analytic System

To gain an understanding of how students decided to go to college, I developed five levels of analysis (see Figure 3.1). Data analyses included examining student discourse, their processes of meaning construction in the interviews, and the content of the conversations, in other words, the what and the how of the interviews (Holstein & Gurbrium, 2003). Level one included transcribing interviews. In level two, I identified topics (e.g., expectations, personal experiences, supports, constraints). In level three, I identified two main topics personal and

supports. In level four I identified two sub topics for personal experiences, in and out of

school experiences. In level five I identified three sub topics (family, school, community) for

the main topic of supports.

Figure 3.1. Five Levels of Analysis
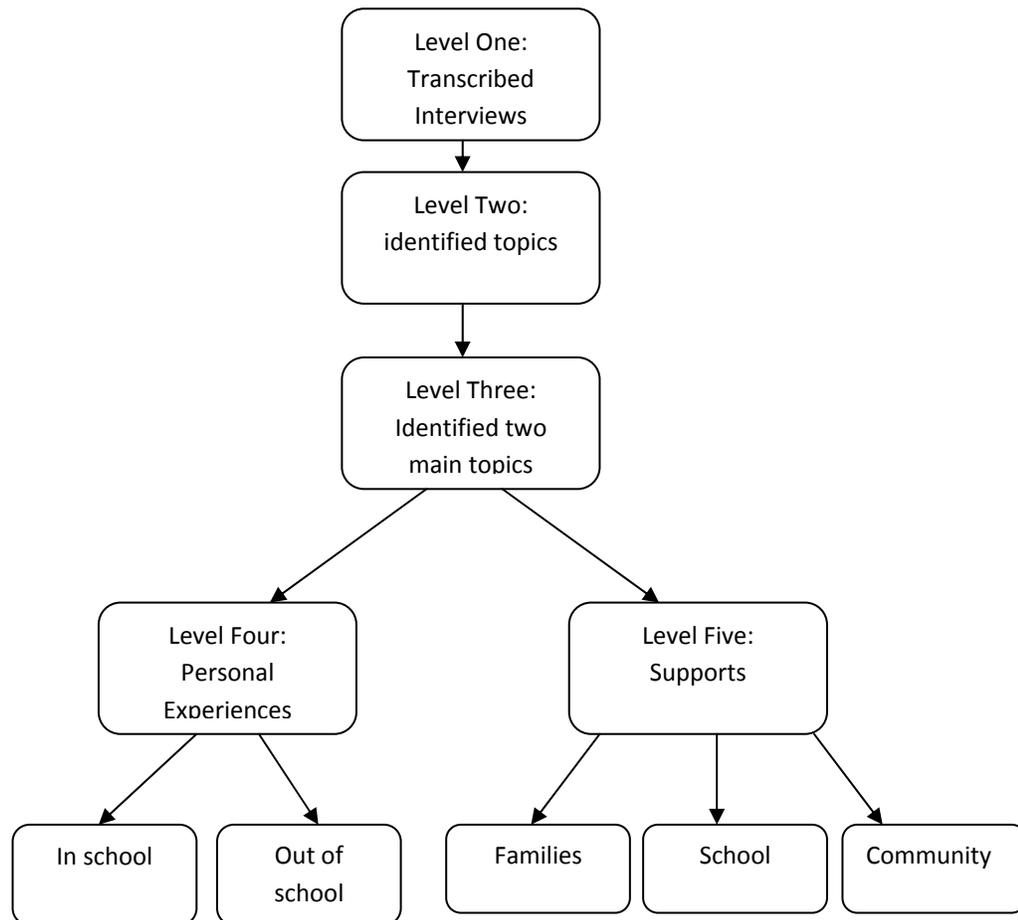
My ultimate goal in constructing five levels of analysis was to produce a coherent,

focused analysis of the students' interviews and to ground the analysis in the data.

First Level of Analysis: Transcribing

In my first level of analysis, I transcribed all six interviews one at a time. Transcribing is the first level of analysis because it requires the researcher to make decisions of what to transcribe and not transcribe, in what way to transcribe, how to format the transcript, and how to represent research participants (Green, Franquiz & Dixon, 1997; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Mishler, 2003; Ochs, 1979). Researchers argue that the way transcripts are constructed will vary based on the theories the researcher uses or the purposes of the transcript (Bucholtz, 2007; Green, et al., 1997). In constructing my transcript I made decisions to create a two column table (see Table 3.3) which allowed me to use the first column to demarcate the speaker. In the second column I included the transcribed speech, represented in the message unit format developed by Green and Wallat (1981). Message units are phrases uttered by the speaker on a moment by moment basis which combine to develop the content of the interview. Given that people do not speak in sentences (Mishler, 2003; Skukauskaite, 2006), message units capture the flow of talk and enable the hearer to make meaning of the developing conversation.

Transcribing the interviews in message units allowed me to gain initial insight in how students were developing their representations of their schooling experiences and decisions to go to college. The insights developed through the analytic process of transcribing individual interviews one by one enabled me to start seeing some of the common topics the students talked about. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) argue that an "analysis takes place and understandings are derived through the process of constructing a transcript by listening and re-listening, viewing and reviewing" (p. 82). Through this initial process of transcribing, I

was able to start noticing topics about how students made decisions to go to college and how they were able to continue on a college pathway.

In Table 3.3, I included an excerpt of Kike's interview as an example of the transcript I constructed at this first level of analysis. The statements are presented in message units. The message units were created by listening to audio record and noting pauses, shifts in intonation, and other contextualization cues (Gumperz & Berenz, 1993) the speaker was using to signal meaning construction. I constructed message units by listening to what the speaker was signaling to the hearer at any particular instant (Green, et al., 1997).

Table 3.3

First Level of Analysis: Excerpt of Kike's Transcribed Interview

Person	Statement
Researcher	ok Kike
	would you please tell me about yourself
	just anything that you wanna share with me
Kike	Okay
	my name is Kike
	born in Florida
	lived there for 14 years of my life
	moved to Texas
	been here for 4 years
	and now I am going to be attending a four-year university

I transcribed each statement listening to the way the students responded to each of my interview questions. I used pseudonyms for names of schools, teachers, participants, and church leaders. The transcript representation in Table 3.3 is presented in message units to show the analytic logic of transcript construction on a message-by-message basis. However in subsequent transcripts in the dissertation I use block quotes to facilitate the readability of the transcript and include a backslash (/) to signal message units.

In the second level of analysis, I focused on identifying the general topics through open coding (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) defines coding as researchers assigning their data some sort of shorthand designation words, letters, numbers, phrases, colors, or a combination of these aspects. I closely examined transcripts line-by-line to identify and formulate main ideas and topics. To accomplish this, I added two columns to my table, main idea and topic. Table 3.4 includes sample excerpts of all six participants' responses. I coded each statement by asking myself the following questions: "What is the main idea of this statement? "What is the student signaling to me?" I did not have pre-established categories (Merriam, 2009). I created the categories by underlining the key words in student discourses. This process allowed me to discover main ideas in each statement. In this second level of analysis, I identified topics of constraints, "want," supports, expectations and personal experiences. For example, when Dahvit stated having financial difficulties to attend college, I underlined the words "I don't have financial," and "money." The underlined words signaled David's difficulties or constraints he has faced in deciding to attend college in the future. I used the same process to identify the rest of the topics shown in table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Second Level of Analysis: Excerpts of Transcribed Interviews- Topics Identified

Person	Statement	Main idea	Topics
Dahvit	Well/ because I <u>don't have the financial/</u> like the <u>money/</u> like to go (to college)	no money to attend college	Constraint
Karo	I have always liked to interact /since I was a little girl I thought <u>I want to be a teacher</u>	wants a teaching career	"want"

Angel	My <u>grandma pushes</u> me a lot	grandmother encourages her	support
Maria	we <u>had to /have very good grades/</u> no absences /no skipping /things like that	program requirements	expectations
Andres	My <u>family</u> /most importantly my <u>mom</u> /like she's always been there for me /and <u>she wants</u> <u>me to be good in school</u>	family mother encourages him to do good	support
Kike	my dad was working in construction and he was doing pretty good /and then we just <u>started coming down</u> /so we had to move closer over her /cause <u>my grandma was</u> <u>also getting</u> sick /and my dad thought he would be able to find more work options over here	change in educational context due to family issues	personal experience

The second level of analysis enabled me to see different topics throughout student interviews. In order to further examine students' decisions to go to college, I used a third level of analysis.

Third Level of Analysis: Discovering Two Main Topics

In my third level of analysis, I focused on statements gathered from interview questions which directly answered my research question: How do first generation high school students decide they want to attend college? In this level of analysis, I specifically looked at the responses to the following interview questions:

1. How did you decide you wanted to go to college?

2. Tell me about the first time you thought about attending college?

3. What helps you succeed or do good in school?

4. What keeps you going and focused on wanting to go to college?

5. Is there anything or anyone at school, home, or in other settings such as clubs or church groups that keeps you focused and motivated on going to college? Tell me about it.

In this level of analysis, the above interview questions were instrumental in providing perspectives on how adolescents had decided to go to college and who or what kept them focused on their decision to attend college despite obstacles they faced throughout their high school experiences. I examined all the topics which had been identified in level two of my analysis.

I examined closely responses to questions 1 through 5 and identified two recurrent topics, personal experiences and supports. I identified the topic of personal experience by examining interview questions 1 and 2 from the above list. I identified the second topic by looking at responses to questions 3, 4 and 5. I grouped questions 1 and 2 because they focused on students deciding to go to college. Using my theoretical lens of funds of knowledge, I was able to identify different knowledge students gained throughout their personal experiences. I grouped questions 3-5 because they focused on students identifying what helped them going on toward college aspirations. A social capital lens was used in questions 3-5. Students talked about different supports (social networks) from which they had gained different social capital. At the third level of analysis, I identified to main topics students talked about personal experiences and supports as important elements of college decisions.

Fourth Level of Analysis: Personal Experiences

To examine what students said about personal experiences, I conducted the fourth

level of analysis and identified in and out of school experiences as instrumental in shaping

students college decisions. In examining responses to questions 1 and 2, I identified that all

six high school students had decided to attend college because of a personal experience which

occurred before they attended high school. I created Table 3.5 to indentify the context of the

personal experiences. I added three columns to the table. In the "Decision to go to college"

column I included where the student had decided to go to college. In the "In/Out of School"

column I identified if the setting was in-school or out-of -school setting. The final column

"Topics" includes the topic I am examining.

Table 3.5

Fourth Level of Analysis: Personal Experiences in Different Contexts

Person	Statements	Decision to go to college	In / out of school	Topics
Dahvit	Like different people/like parents I guess/that went to talk to us/like career day thing/ and they talked how they had to go to college/some of their jobs and stuff/ so I guess I thought about it/ I need to go to college.	middle school during Career Day	in	Personal experience
Angel	Yeah they would be taking to us/ or when somebody would go present/ I think one time in the auditorium someone went to go present/ but I don't remember/I think it was someone from the university or one of the teachers.	middle school during University Day	in	Personal experience
Maria	Well yeah/he told me/he said/since that day I told him I want to be like/you/he said go ahead/ and whenever you are going to get into	in a hospital visit while keeping her cousin	out	Personal experience

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	college/call me so I can give you a scholarship/anything you needed/so call me back for whatever you need.	company		
Andres	It was Mrs. Sanchez/my reading teacher/ yeah she told me about college/and that I should like/look forward for that/and not just go to high school/and like/just face that/like there's/like I have chances to go to college/ and have a better future for myself/ and then I started worrying about that (college)/she told me about different options I had and everything	middle school talking to his reading teacher	in	Personal experience
Kike	I think it was when I was about 13 years old I don't know what grade/but I know I was 13 years old/the first time that I ever gone to work with my dad in construction/man/that stuff is tough/ man that's when I first/like in my mind/I didn't really think about college before or anything like that/ but after working there one day/first time I was with my dad I was like/I'm gonna go to college/ I don't wanna be doing this/cause its tough	Construction work with his father	out	Personal experience
Karo	My mom was not able to finish school (in Mexico)/ my grandmother had financial problems and could not finish/she had to leave the school	Financial struggles as a little girl	out	Personal experience

For example, in analyzing Dahvit's interview, I identified that the experience which shaped his college decision first occurred in school. It was during a career day activity that he had his first college-going thought. In the third column, I indicated that he decided to attend college in middle school. The "In/Out School" column indicated that his decision occurred in the context of school. In the last column I identified the main topic, personal experience.

In this same table in included students' out of school experiences. For example, Maria recalls an out of school personal experience she had while she was visiting her cousin who was a patient at a children's hospital. Maria's statement (table 3.5) signals that her first college-going thoughts were outside the school context. At this fourth level of analysis, I was able to see that students' decisions to go to college were shaped by experiences within or outside the school.

Fifth Level of Analysis: Supports

To understand further how students maintained their decisions to go to college, I returned to the topic of supports I had indentified in level three and conducted the fifth level of analysis. In level five of analysis, I examined the responses to the three interview questions which elicited students' responses about what kept them pursuing college aspirations:

3. What helps you succeed or do good in school?

4. What keeps you going and focused on wanting to go to college?

5. Is there anything or anyone at school, home, or in other settings such as clubs or church groups that keeps you focused and motivated on going to college? Tell me about it.

All six interviewees discussed some kind of support during their high school experiences which helped them to continue to aspire to post secondary education. I constructed Table 3.6 to include a column titled "influences" and to identify what kind of influence they were receiving through the support. The next column includes information about the settings of the support and the last column shows the topic, support.

Table 3.6

Fifth Level of Analysis: Excerpt of Supports in Different Contexts

Person	Statement	Influences	In / out of school	Topic
Dahvit	Well/I guess God/I know he has like plans for me or something/ I know he has something better for me/but I have to work for it/ I can't stay here doing nothing	Church/relationship with God	out	support
Karo	like my pre-cal teacher and geometry/I had him two years	Math teacher	in	support
Angel	well my aunts and uncles/they basically tell me the same thing/ my grandma tells me/ to finish school and help my grandma to do better than my mom	aunts and uncles	out	support

For example, in analyzing Angel's interview, I identified that family members had provided her with some support in her college decision. In the second column I identified who provides the support, aunts and uncles. In the fourth column I included if this support is provided in or out of school. In the last column I identify the topic, support.

To see all kinds of supports mentioned by each high school student further, I created Table 3.7 in which I included all the supports students had mentioned throughout the responses to the three aforementioned questions. I identified three supports: family, school, and community. Table 3.7 includes students' names (pseudonyms) and grade level. I arranged students in order of grade level starting with 9th grade. The rows going across identify the kind of support mentioned by each student: family, school, and community.

Table 3.7

Kinds of Supports by Participant

Maria (9th)	Angel (9th)	Andres (10th)	Dahvit (12th)	Karo (12th)	Kike (12th)
Family	Family	Family	Family	Family	Family
Mother	Grandmother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Father
Father	Aunts				
Aunt	Uncles				
School	School	School	School	School	School
Dual enrollment counselors		Teaches	Band director	Teachers	Migrant teacher
		Soccer Coach	Teacher	Counselor	
Dual enrollment teachers					
Community	Community	Community	Community	Community	Community
Doctor	Sunday school teacher	Church group	Sunday school teacher		Youth leader

In analyzing students' interviews I was able to identify supports for each student. Throughout the interview, Maria stated having support from her family, school personnel and a member of the community. Not all students had the same amount of supports. Angel stated having family and community support but did not talk about supports as school. Karo on the other hand, had supports in her family and at school, but not in the community. The five levels of analyses enabled me to see the variety of factors that shape and maintain college going decisions of first generation Hispanic high school students.

In this chapter I discussed methodological and theoretical conceptualizations of interview as a data collection method and a theoretically based research approach (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009. For the purpose of this study, I utilized open-

ended qualitative interviewing to gain students' insights about their decisions to go to college. In this chapter I presented the methodology for the study and described the setting, the participants, and the data collection and analysis procedures. I also revealed the five levels of analysis I used to analyze the open-ended interviews in order to understand students' experiences and how these experiences shaped their college-going decisions. In the next chapter I show and interpret the analysis of my data.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATION

In this chapter I analyze the two main topics about student college-going experiences I had identified in chapter three. First I analyzed the personal experiences which students talked about as shaping their decisions to want to go to college. I demonstrate that these personal experiences fall into two categories and include experiences in school and out of school. I then analyze the second topic of supports students made visible as necessary for their continuing pursuit of college aspirations. The supports students talked about included families, school personnel, and community members. At the end of this chapter I use the theoretical lenses of funds of knowledge and social capital to discuss personal experiences and supports as ways of becoming actively involved in creating and sustain students' college pathways.

Personal Experiences

In addressing the research question: How do first-generation Hispanic high school students decide they want to attend college, I have discovered that for all six participants the process of deciding to go to college began through a personal experience. These experiences occurred either inside or outside of school. Three students learned about college through the efforts of educators in the school context, while the rest first learned about college through conversations with family and community members outside of school.

Developing College Aspirations through

Personal Experiences in the School Context

In describing their first awareness about college, Dahvit, Angel and Andres indicated that they learned about college in the context of the middle school they attended. As represented in the third column of Table 3.5, Dahvit's awareness about college was brought about through a career day activity, Angel's through a university day activity, and Andres' awareness came from talking to a reading teacher.

David Develops College Aspirations through a Contrastive Experience with Information in the Middle School Career Day

Dahvit started thinking about college when he was in middle school. When I asked Dahvit to tell me about the first time he thought about going to college, he pointed out a career day activity that he attended when he was in 6th grade. Professionals were invited to his classroom. These professionals (lawyers and doctors) were parents of students in his class. The parents talked about their profession and the benefits of having a profession. The next question I asked Dahvit was and experience question. "What did this experience do for you?" In his response Dahvit started talking about his family and how his family's situation was different from what he was seeing in the presentation of these professionals. Through his discourse he signaled how this visit had shaped his decision to go to college. Career day was when he began to envision the importance of college. For Dahvit the decision of going to college was through him juxtaposing the consequences of his current situation to the consequences of the future with a career. In Table 4.1 I examined Dahvit's discourse to

understand how he analyzed his current situation and to show how Dahvit's experience

shaped his decision to go to college.

Table 4.1

Dahvit's Juxtaposing Experience

Person speaking	Line number	Statement	Discourse signals
Researcher	1	What did this experience do to you?	
Dahvit	2	Well I felt <u>embarrassed</u> because my mom is <u>not</u> a doctor a teacher or something	Embarrassed Not
	3	you know well my mom <u>wasn't</u> like <u>any</u>	wasn't, any
	4	she <u>didn't</u> have a <u>job</u> like that	didn't, job
	5	like a <u>professional career</u> or something	Professional career
	6	we <u>don't have like the money</u> like to support us	don't have like the money
	7	she gets <u>help from the government</u> and stuff	help from the government
	8	and yeah so I wanted	
Researcher	9	How did you feel about the visit?	
Dahvit	10	Well made me <u>feel bad</u>	feel bad
	11	<u>I felt embarrassed</u> because my <u>mom was not a</u> doctor a teacher or something	I felt embarrassed Mom was not
	12	you know like <u>I did not want to grow up and I did not want my</u> kid my son or daughter to <u>feel like my dad is nobody</u>	I did not want grow up and I did not want my feel like my dad is nobody

In Table 4.1 I underlined the words which signaled what this career day experience did

for Dahvit. After I asked Dahvit "what did this experience do to you?" (line 1), he started

using words "embarrassed" and "not" (line 2) to explain why he was embarrassed, which was

because his mother was not a professional. In line 3 he used the words "wasn't" and "any" which signaled once again what his mother is not; he did not mention what his mother is. In line 4 he used words "didn't" and "job" to contrast his mother's current job to the professionals who attended the school. Dahvit used negative words to contrast a professional "doctor" and "teacher" to not having anything, like his mother.

In line 5 he continued to explain what his mother did not have, which is a professional career. Lines 4 and 5 juxtapose the professions of "doctor" and "teacher" to not having a job or a professional career. In line 6 he stated "don't have like the money" and in line 7 he said "help from the government." In these lines (6 & 7) he provided his view of the consequences for his mother not having a professional career. In line 8 he clearly stated "so I wanted." This statement reiterates his decision to attend college and shows ownership for his decision. Through this experience Dahvit sought change to his current situation and envisioned a career.

In line 9 I asked Dahvit the following question: "how did you feel about this visit?" In his response, in addition to viewing his family's current situation as contrasting with those of the professional parents presenting during the career day, Dahvit looked toward the future. In line 10 he talked about the past experience in middle school and describes how he felt with the words "feel bad." In line 11 he repeated the word "embarrassed" to show his overall feeling in the past and he uses "mom was not" to refer back to his current situation and his mom not being a doctor or a teacher.

In line 12 Dahvit stated, "I did not want to grow up" and "did not want my kid." He indicated that his college going decision was also shaped by his look toward the future as a parent. In line 12 he stated that he did not want his children to feel like he was a "nobody"

because he was not a professional. Dahvit felt his mother was considered a "nobody"

compared to the parents who visited his class. Dahvit's concept of "nobody" is derived from

his mom not being a professional. Dahvit builts on what he shared with me earlier in the

interview: that his mother is a home provider. He contrasted his mom's position to that of the

doctors and teachers who visited his classroom. Not having a profession or a name to call

yourself is the reason why he saw his mother as a nobody and did not want to follow in her

footsteps.

Dahvit's decision to go to college was influenced and shaped by his home situation.

Dahvit expressed feelings of sadness and embarrassment that moved him to envision college

in order to prevent his own children from feeling belittled or less than his peers. In this

experience Dahvit was able to contrast the possible consequences for not having a career. His

current understanding of the consequences of not being a "doctor" or a "teacher" allowed him

to envision a different view of self and different possibilities for his life. He saw college as a

way to this different life.

Angel and Andres Develop College Aspirations through Middle School College Awareness

Opportunities

In addition to career day, which was instrumental for Dahvit in shaping his

understanding of importance of college, the middle schools also had other activities that

exposed students to information about college. Angel stated she first thought about college

during a presentation of university representatives, while Andres talked about his reading

teacher as a person who exposed him to college. The college awareness activities built into

the middle school curriculum became instrumental in shaping student aspirations toward college.

Angel started thinking about college through a university visit to her school. When I asked Angel to tell me about the first time she started thinking about college, Angel stated that the first time she had thought about college was during a university visit. Representatives from the local university brought college entrance information. Angel remembers a talk or presentation about college and it was at this point she started thinking about college. Table 4.2 includes an excerpt from a transcript in which Angel talks about the first time she thought about college. In analyzing this transcript, I noted her discourse signaled the various actors involved in the college awareness experience. By adding the "Actor" column I was able to identify how Angel's understanding of college is focused not so much on her own decision, but on the actions of others.

Table 4.2

Angel's College Awareness Experience

Person speaking	Line number	Statement	Discourse signals	Actor
Researcher	1	Tell me about the first time you thought about attending college.		you
Angel	2	Yeah <u>they would be talking</u> to us	they would be talking	they
	3	or when <u>somebody</u> would <u>go present</u>	somebody, go present	somebody
	4	I think one time in the auditorium <u>someone went to go present</u>	someone, went to go present	someone
	5	but <u>I don't remember</u>	I don't remember	I
	6	I think it was someone <u>from the university</u> or one of the <u>teachers</u>	from university, teachers	someone one of the teachers

In table 4.2, line 1 shows my request for Angel to tell me about the first time she started thinking about college. I focused this statement on her. However, in her response she focused on other people. In line 2, Angel states "they would be talking," which signals others are doing the talking and acting in this university visit. In lines 3 and 4 Angel uses words "somebody" and "someone went to go present" to signal others presenting and not her. In line 5 Angel uses the pronoun "I." However, by adding "don't remember" she expresses that she is doubtful of what really occurred. In line 6 she shifts right back to talking about other members ("teachers") from the university.

Angel's experience about her first time thinking about college is mainly focused on others. She does not say how she actually started thinking about college. Nowhere in lines 2-6 does Angel mention going to college. She only focuses on what others were doing during that university visit. The persons and pronouns in the actor column indicate that this experience was just something others were telling her. Angel in her discussion about the first time she thought about college does not indicate ownership of the decision. She signals others were presenting and she was just listening. In this response, Angel does not indicate any action. She is distant about attending college. This personal experience in school gave her just college awareness.

The college awareness activities built into the middle school curriculum became instrumental in shaping Dahvit's, Angel's and Andres' aspirations toward college. Angel's personal experience was just a college awareness experience. Andres's experience in school was more like Dahvit's experience during career day. Andres also looked toward the future to decide go to college. Unlike Angel who was a passive listener, Andres became an active participant in shaping his own future.

Andres said he started thinking about college during a talk with his reading teacher in his reading classroom. Andres recalls his teacher talking to the class about college and the possibilities and benefits college can offer. Table 4.3 includes an excerpt from a transcript in which Andres talked about the first time he thought about college. In analyzing this transcript, I noted discourse signals. The last column includes the person acting. This "actor" column allowed me to identify Andres' understanding of college and how his focus on college changed during the talk with his reading teacher.

Table 4.3

Andres' College Awareness Experience

Person speaking	Line number	Statement	Discourse signals	Actor
Researcher	1	Tell me about the first time you thought about attending college.		You
Andres	2	It was my reading teacher	My reading teacher	Teacher
	3	Yeah she told me about college	She told me about college	She
	4	And that I should like	I	I
	5	Look forward for that not just go to high school	Look forward, not just go to high school	
	6	I have chances to go to college	I have chances	I
	7	and have a better future for myself	have a better future for myself	Myself
	8	And then I started worrying about that	I started worrying	I
	9	She told me about different options I had and everything	She told me, different options	She, I

I asked Andres the question (line 1) to prompt him to talk about the first time he started thinking about college. I focused this statement on him, whereas his response was

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refocused on his reading teacher (line 2). In line 3 he continues to focus the action on his reading teacher by saying "she told me about college." At this point, Andres' experience is similar to Angel's in which they are only having a college awareness experience. In line 4 Andres uses the pronoun "I" but in his discourse he does not signal any ownership of his decision to go to college.

I line 6 he starts to take some ownership by stating that he has chances to go to college. In line 7 he looks toward the future when he states "have a better future for myself." Like Dahvit, Andres is signaling that he knows the consequences of having a career and not having a career. With this statement he signals that having a career will bring a better future for him in comparison to his current situation. Andres built on the previous information he shared with me about his father being in jail and his mother having to work to support three children. He had mentioned how it was difficult for his mother to make ends meet with a minimum wage job. In line 8 Andres said "started worrying" in which he signaled that he became an actor in his decision to go to college. He not only worried about college, but also about the different options (line 9) he could have in the future. Andres contrasts his present condition with a better future with a career. Like Dahvit, through a personal experience in the school setting, Andres was able to envision the future and became active by worrying and envisioning college. Through this college awareness experience he became an active agent in constructing his own future.

It was through personal experiences in the school context that Dahvit, Angel and Andres began thinking about college. Dahvit's experience was a contrast between his current situation and the professional life, and Angel's and Andres' experience included college awareness experiences. However for Angel, this college awareness experience was an

exposure to information and not a decision she made. Like Dahvit, Andres envisioned having a better future and better options. Both participants understood the importance of college in reaching this better future.

Personal Experiences in Different Out of School Contexts

In describing their first awareness about college, Maria, Kike, and Karo indicated that they learned about college in different out of school contexts. Table 3.5 had showed when each student decided to go to college. As represented in the third column of Table 3.5, Maria's awareness about college was during a hospital visit, Kike's was on his first day of construction work with his father, and Karo's awareness came from the difficult financial situation at home.

Developing College Aspirations through a Personal Experience: Maria

Maria started thinking about college when she was in third grade. She recalls visiting her cousin at the hospital because her cousin had been diagnosed with Leukemia. Her cousin's doctor took the time to show her around the hospital and explained different types of diseases suffered by children. During that visit her cousin died but the doctor resuscitated her. The doctor who helped her cousin became Maria's inspiration. Maria also shared in her interview that she told the doctor she wanted to become a doctor as well, to which the doctor had replied with an offer of financial support if she ever needed it for college. To this date, Maria has kept the doctor's information and said she will look for the doctor when the time comes for her to go to college.

In Table 4.4 I have analyzed Maria's discourse to understand how her personal experience shaped her decision to go to college and decide on a specific career. By adding the "Actor" column I was able to identify Maria's understandings of college and herself in relationship to this college decision.

Table 4.4

Maria's Inspirational Personal Experience: Out of School Context

Person speaking	Line number	Statement	Discourse signals	Actor
Researcher	1	Tell me about the first time you thought about attending college.		You
Maria	2	Well my smaller cousin	smaller cousin	Cousin
	3	There is only two females in our family	two females in our family	Family
	4	But she had Leukemia	Leukemia	Cousin
	5	and she had to be in the hospital	hospital	Cousin
	6	She already was going to die and everything and	going to die	Cousin
	7	Well the doctor there was showing me different types of children their diseases	doctor, showing	Doctor
	8	But like it interested me	interested me	Me
	9	Like the different	different	
	10	How it is fun to a patient child	fun to a patient	
	11	Like you can be patient take care of them	be patient, care of them	a doctor
	12	So she had like died for thirty minutes	she, died	cousin
	13	I did not know what was going on	I	I
	14	But like called a code blue and revived her and everything is fine	Revived her, everything is fine	They Her (cousin)
	15	He is one of my inspirations and everything	He, my inspirations	He(doctor)

In line 1, I asked Maria to tell me about the first time she thought about attending college. In line 2 Maria began talking about her "smaller cousin" and not about herself. In line 3 she stated that her cousin was the only other female in the family. In lines 4 and 5 she explained that her cousin was in the hospital because she had been diagnosed with Leukemia. In line 6 she used the words "she was going to die" to explain that her cousin's condition was life-threatening. Throughout lines 2-6 Maria talked about the cousin and not herself or her decision about college.

In line 7 she turned her focus to her cousin's doctor and explained what the doctor had been "showing" her at the hospital. The doctor took the time to show her around the hospital and explained about different children's diseases. In line 8 Maria said "it interested me" to focus the conversation on her. She signaled that the information given to Maria by the doctor was of interest to her and relevant because of her cousin's medical condition. In lines 9-11 Maria explained some things the doctor told her about being a children's doctor. She used the words "fun to a patient," "be patient" and "take care of them" to describe some duties the doctors have with ill children in the hospital. In talking about those conversations with the doctor Maria is indicating her interest in medicine. Yet, except for line 8, where she signaled her interest, so far in lines 2-12 Maria did not state the relevance of this information to the question I asked.

In line 12, Maria shifts her focus back to her cousin. She states that her cousin died. The sudden shift Maria makes back to her cousin signals how abrupt this event was in Maria's life. She changes from words like "fun," "patient," and "take care" to "so she had died like for thirty minutes." In line 13 Maria uses "I" to signal she was there and did not know what was happening at that moment. In line 14 she shifts her focus back to her cousin and the

doctor to explain that the doctor had "revived" her cousin. Maria was able to see first-hand how a children's doctor took care of her only cousin. This experience brought Maria an awareness of a career which interested her because it meant saving people's lives. In line 14 she also states that everything with her cousin was fine after the doctor brought her back to life. This doctor became one of her inspirations (line 15) in becoming a children's doctor. In responding to my question about the first time she thought about college, Maria recounts an event from personal experience. This experience became instrumental in Maria pursuing a doctor's career which requires a college education. In answering my question about college by telling about an out of school personal experience, Maria builds on the information she had shared earlier with me about wanting to be a pediatrician. In line 15 Maria looks at the future and envisions the possibility of her saving other children's lives by deciding to go to college.

Developing College Aspirations through an Out of School Personal Experience: Kike

For Kike aspiring to attend college also came from a personal experience outside the school setting. When I asked Kike to tell me about the first time he thought about college, he recalled the first time he did construction work with his father at the age of 13. Kike talked about how this type of work was tough. It was during this "tough" day at work that he decided he will go to college. In table 4.5, I analyze Kike's discourse by underlining words which signal his decision to go to college. I also underlined words that Kike repeated throughout his response which allowed me to analyze Kike's response. I added the "Actor" column to analyze who is the actor in this conversation and to examine how Kike is positioning himself as an active participant in shaping his own future.

Table 4.5

Kike's Personal Experience: Out of School Context

Person speaking	Line number	Statement	Discourse signals	Actor
Researcher	1	Tell me about the first time you thought about attending college.		You
Kike	2	I think it was when I was about 13 years old	13 years old	I
	3	I don't know what grade	I don't know	I
	4	But I know I was 13 years old the first time that I ever gone to worked with my dad in construction	13 years old, first time, worked, my dad, construction	I
	5	Man that stuff is tough	tough	
	6	That 's when I first like in my mind I didn't really think about college before or anything like that	I first, think about college	I
	7	But after working there one day first time	Working, one day, first time	I
	8	I was like nahh I'm gonna go to college	I'm gonna go to college	I
	9	I don't wanna be doing this cause it is tough	I don't wanna, tough	I

In response to my question to tell me about the first time he thought about attending college (line 1), Kike focused his response on his age. He stated "13 years old" (line 4) to indicate his age during a personal experience which became instrumental in his college aspirations. In line 3, Kike again referred to himself and stated "I don't know" to signal he was not sure what grade he was in but he was sure he was a specific age. In that same line he said, "13 years old." This is the second time Kike talked about his age thus signaling the importance for him that his experience was early on. He said he could not recall what grade he was in but he did remember his age. In that same line (3) he useed the words "first time," "worked," "my dad," and "construction." In this line he signaled to me that it is important to

him that he started thinking about college when he was 13. In line 5 he used the word

"tough" to explain how he perceived that day's construction work with his father. In line 6 he

directly stated that the first time he started thinking about college was during this experience.

In line 7 he used "working," "one day," and "first time" to signal that one day, one time,

working in construction was enough for him to decide he wanted to go to college. In line 8 he

repeated he wanted to go to college and in line 9 he took a look at the future and decided he

did not want to be working in construction as an adult. The type of work he was exposed to

on that day with his father was enough for him to envision college and decide he did not want

to go back to work in construction. The "actor" column indicated Kike is the actor throughout

the whole response. At the early age of 13, Kike was able to understand the consequences of

not having a college degree. He did not want to work in construction as an adult and

reflecting on that experience became an active participant in shaping his own future.

Developing College Aspirations through a Personal Experience: Karo

For Karo the first time she thought about college was thinking about her mother's and

grandmother's limited schooling experience and its consequences. Karo talked about her

mother and grandmother, both of whom had to leave school because of financial difficulties.

The difficulties she saw her mother and grandmother facing led Karo to a determination to

finish school and become a professional. In table 4.6, I underlined words that indicated the

elements of what shaped Karo's decisions. I also added an "Actor" column to analyze how

Karo demonstrated she was an active participant in deciding to go to college.

Table 4.6

Karo's Personal Experience: Out of School Context

Person speaking	Line number	Statement	Discourse signals	Actor
Researcher	1	Tell me about the first time you thought about attending college.		you
Karo	2	My <u>mom</u> was <u>not able</u> to finish school	Mom, not able	Mom
	3	My grandmother <u>had financial problems</u> and <u>could not</u> finish	had financial problems, could not	grandmother
	4	<u>she</u> had to leave the school	She, leave	She
	5	I had that <u>mentality</u> of <u>I will graduate</u>	mentality, I will graduate	I
	6	<u>I will</u> have my <u>career</u>	I will career	I
	7	<u>I will</u> be a <u>professional</u>	I will	I
	8	I <u>will</u> have a job <u>to help my mother</u>	to help my mother	I

In line 1, I asked Karo to tell me about the first time she started thinking about college. In line 2 Karo stated "mom" and "not able." Using these words, Karo signaled that her focus was on what her mother had to do which was "having to leave school" (line 4). In line 3 the actor is her grandmother. In this line Karo provided the reason why her grandmother also was not able to complete school. Her grandmother had financial problems and had to leave school (line 4). In line 5 Karo shifted the focus of the conversation to herself and described what she thinks she will do in comparison to her mother and grandmother. In line 5 Karo stated, "I will graduate." Karo signaled determination in the midst of the family's financial problems. In this excerpt Karo expanded on her earlier conversation with me about her mother having to work cleaning houses to support Karo and her brother. Karo had seen her grandmother and her mother struggle financially. By stating "I will" (lines 6-7) she positions herself in the future. She no longer referred to the past and the current financial situations. She focused on

what she will do to change her current situation and break the cycle of having to drop out of school because of financial difficulties.

The first change she is determined to accomplish is graduating from high school. In line 5 she repeated "I will." This repeated word signals her determination to achieve more than her mother and grandmother. In this line she stated what she will do after she graduates from high school. Karo is determined to get a career after high school. In line 7 she repeated "I will" to show determination and to continue to explain what her plans are after graduation. She plans to become a professional. In line 8 she repeated "I will" to continue to emphasize the importance of her decision and to explain why she is so determined. She ended this part of the interview by stating "to help my mother." In line 8 Karo focused back to her mother stating she will be able to help her mother after she attains education and becomes a career professional.

In this part of the interview, Karo signaled her understanding of attending college and the consequences for not getting an education. Karo understood that the only way she will be able to help her mother is by going to college. Karo also showed understanding about what steps she needs to take in order to be able to help her mother: graduate, go to college, get a career, become a professional and get a job. Like Dahvit, Andres, Maria, and Kike, Karo also became an active participant in shaping her own future.

Supports: Ways of Supporting Student College Pathways

While all six students demonstrated that they started thinking about college through personal experiences in or out of school, they also made visible that deciding to go to college was more than one moment in time. They took action in deciding and continued to take

actions to move them forward toward their college future. The personal experiences, whether

in school or out of school context, were instrumental in shaping their decisions throughout

their high school experiences. Participants recalled thinking about college before high school,

and also talked about ways they were proactive in acquiring different kinds of supports

throughout their journey through high school. Acquiring or taking the supports available was

instrumental in keeping alive their decision of going to college. It is not enough to say I want

to go to college – action needs to be involved to make this happen for students. In this section

I discuss how these students maintained their college decision and took action in finding or

creating supports that moved them toward their goal of college.

I used Spradley's (1979) analytic system of domain analysis to identify kinds of

supports. At the fifth level of analysis, I went back to the interviews and searched for the

kinds of supports students mentioned throughout the interviews. My starting point in this

level of analysis was identifying the semantic relationships among the different supports

students mentioned. From Spradley's (1980) nine semantic relationships, I selected strict

inclusion because this type relationship allowed me to identify the kinds of supports students

mentioned throughout their interviews. Strict inclusion is in the form of "X is a kind of Y"

(Spradley, 1980, p.89). I used domain analysis to include terms under the section of supports.

In Table 3.7 I have indentified the kinds of supports participants acquired as they

continued to pursue their college aspirations. When I asked the participants what helped them

stay focused on their decision to go to college, I was able to identify several supports students

have looked for in order to keep their college aspirations alive and ongoing. I identified three

supports: 1) family, 2) school, and 3) community. Figure 4.1, represents the three supports

previously identified in Table 3.7. The cover term is "supports," which has three included

terms (family, school and community). The included terms share a semantic relationship, a

kind of (Spradley, 1980).

Figure 4.1. Domain Analysis: Kinds of Supports

Included Terms   Semantic Relationship   Cover Term

Family

School

Community   is a kind of   Support

As represented in Figure 4.1, students stated that families, schools, and communities

supported them and helped them to continue to have college aspirations. These supports

influenced students in their daily lives and in decisions in high school. Students were able to

strategically take actions based on their understanding of consequences and opportunities of

college and family life. In the next sections I analyze what students said about ways family,

school, and community provided the supports they needed to continue on their college

pathways.

Families' Ways of Supporting Student College Pathways

Throughout the interviews students repeated that families offered support by talking to

them. For these students, families include mothers, grandmothers, fathers, aunts, uncles and

cousins. Family members became a support by taking action and envisioning college in

conjunction with the students. Families talked about consequences for not attending college.

Students were able to envision themselves as college-going students to avoid experiencing

those same consequences experienced by their family members.

Families' Talk about Consequences for Not Going to College: A Way of Supporting Students'

College Pathways

Family members offered support to students by talking about consequences for not

going to college. I used the term "talk" rather than conversations because students used this

term to describe what families were doing. For example in Table 4.8 I have included an

excerpt of Kike's interview excerpt. Kike stated (line 4), "He (dad) tells me you know you

don't want to be out here in the sun all day."   Kike does not indicate he carried a conversation

with his father only that his father would talk to him about working in construction. Figure

4.2 includes two topics family members talked about.

Figure 4.2. Domain Analysis: Topics Families Talked About
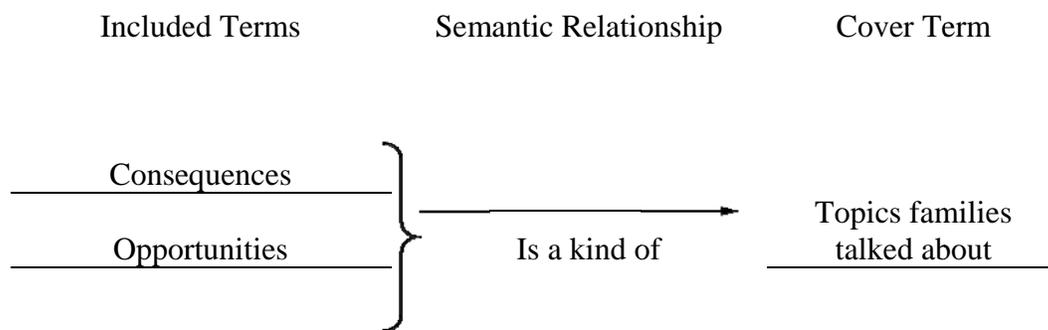
Family members talked about consequences for not going to college and opportunities

students had if they attended college.

In this section I use telling cases (Mitchell, 1984) to identify particular kinds of

supports. Using telling cases helps me to illustrate a particular kind of support a student made

visible. The telling cases I discuss in this section provide the most explicit illustration of the support which other students may not have mentioned explicitly. The purpose of highlighting telling cases is to provide the wide range of the kinds of supports that can help students in their college-going pathways. To discuss consequences family members talked about with students, I used Maria and Kike's interview excerpts to show that students were able to continue to want to go to college after family members talked to them about certain topics. In figure 4.3, I have included two categories of family talk students repeated throughout their interviews.

Figure 4.3. Domain Analysis: Consequences Talked about

Included Terms   Semantic Relationship   Cover Term

Marriage

Work Conditions   is a kind of   Consequences talked about
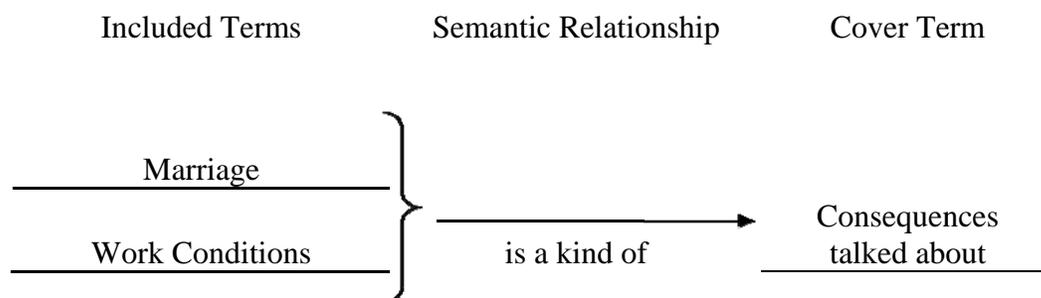
Family members talked about the consequences of marrying before finishing college. They also talked about the consequences of not attending college and having to work a "tough" job.

Families' talk about getting married. In table 4.7 I include an excerpt of Maria's transcript to show the consequences Maria's aunt has talked to her about in regards to marriage. Understanding those consequences became instrumental in Maria wanting to go to college first before considering marriage.

Table 4.7

Maria's Excerpt: Consequences for Getting Married before Finishing College

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Maria	1	I wish I could have finished that…
	2	…I am trying to go back and finish my pharmacy tech
	3	And right now it is going to be hard because I have my job, my husband, my bills and everything…
	4	I want to go back and be something different
		I don't want to be stuck being that…
Researcher	5	And does that motivate you
	6	Kind of paint a picture of what you want?
Maria	7	Yeah
Researcher	8	It's harder when you get married?
Maria	9	And with children
Researcher	10	So marriage to you is like
Maria	11	When I am done being what I want

Maria recalls her aunt talking to her about how difficult it is to go to college once a person gets married. In line 1 Maria tells me that her aunt wished she could have finished college. In line 2 Maria provides details that her aunt would like to go back and finish a pharmacy technician degree. In line 3 Maria uses the word "hard" to signal that her aunt is having difficulty going back to finish her degree because she has a job, a husband, and bills to pay. The consequences for not finishing college are stated in line 5. Maria says her aunt is "stuck" at her current job and has not been able to go back and finish her degree. In line 5 and 6, I asked Maria if she was motivated through her aunt's explanation about not attending college. In line 7 Maria states that yes it does motivate her to continue to want to go to college.

In line 8 I asked Maria if she thought it was harder to go to college once a person gets married. In line 9 Maria interjects by saying "and with children." With this phrase Maria

signals that she has envisioned herself like her aunt and with children. She indicated that she would not like to be in the same situation. In line 10 I asked her about marriage. In line 11 Maria responds that she will marry when she is "done being what I want." This line signals that Maria envisions what she wants to be. She does not want to be married and without a career. She understands the consequences getting married without finishing college brings. She wants to go to college and will marry later. Her aunt got married before going to college and is working in a minimum wage paying job because she has no college degree. Maria continues on her college pathway because of the knowledge gained through her aunt's talk about consequences.

In the previous section on personal experiences out of school I had included an excerpt from Kike's interview (Table 4.5) in which he described the kind of job his father has to work because he did not go to college. In lines 5 and 9 Kike had repeated the word "tough" to describe construction work with his father. Kike's father also took the time to talk to Kike about another topic, work conditions.

Families' talk about work condition. Kike's father has talked about how working in construction is difficult. In table 4.8, I have included an excerpt where Kike says what his father tells him about working conditions.

Table 4.8

Kike's Excerpt: Working Conditions

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	Like what was your drive or what pushed you?
Kike	2	My dad definitely my dad
Researcher	3	What would he tell you
Kike	4	He tells me you know you don't wanna be out here in the sun all day
	5	because I work with him
	6	You wanna be in an office with air conditioner
	7	I want that …every time I go to school…I make sure I pay attention

In line 1 I asked Kike to tell me what his drive was or who pushed him to go to college. In line 2 he said that his dad was the one who encouraged him. He uses the word "definitely" to signal that without a doubt his father has pushed him to go to college. In line 3 I directly asked Kike what his father has told him. In line 4 Kike says that his father tells him "you don't want to be out here in the sun all day." This statement signals the conditions for work in construction. In line 6 Kike states his father tells him he should be in an office with an air conditioner. In line 7 Kike states he wants to go to college. He also added that college was the reason why he made sure he paid attention in school. Kike's father encourages him to get a career so he will not have to work in a tough job "in the sun all day" in the future. Kike's father has talked to him about consequences for not attending college and consequences for attending college. Kike continues thinking about college and pays attention in school in order to get to college. In this excerpt Kike implies his understanding that work conditions depend on education. Kike's decisions in high school were shaped by his father talking to him about working in construction.

Family members were active agents in students' pathways to college. It was during a personal experience that students started thinking about college, but it was through family members talking to them about marriage and tough jobs that students continued to think about college and became strategic in high school. Students viewed themselves as college-going students. They were influenced by similar talks and did not want to experience the consequences for not attending college. Family members have also talked about opportunities students had if they decided to go to college.

Families' Talk about Opportunities for Attending College: A Way of Supporting Students' College Pathways

In Figure 4.4 I have identified in the "Included Terms" column two kinds of talks about opportunity family members had with students. 1) Family members talked to students being "being better" if they went to college; and 2) Families gave students information about school.

Figure 4.4. Talk about Opportunity by Family Members

Included Terms   Semantic Relationship   Cover Term

"Being Better"

Information about school   Is a kind of   Talk about opportunity by family members
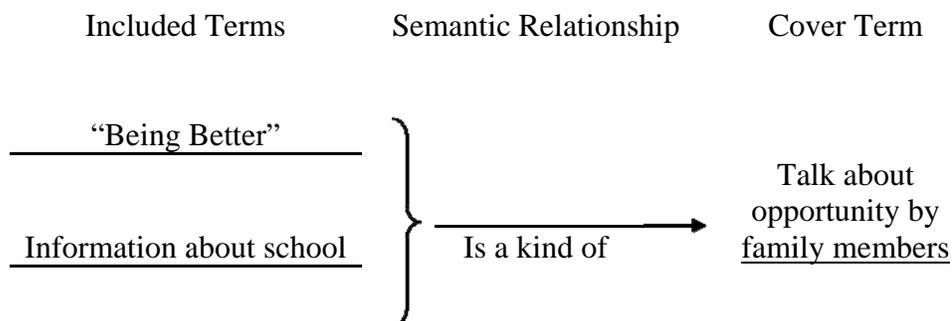
Angel's, Karo's, and Maria's family members provide telling cases for understanding ways in which talks about opportunities can become supports and shape students' actions in pursuing their college aspirations.

Families talk about "being better." Families talked to students about being better if they attended college. Angel shared about how her grandmother, aunts and uncles tell her she needs to go to college in order for her to "be better." In table 3.6 (p. 49) I had included Angel's excerpt in which she stated that her aunts and uncles tell her the same thing her grandmother tells her: For her to finish school in order for her to be able to help her grandmother and do better. For Angel finishing school gives her and opportunity for "being better." In Table 4.9 I have included an excerpt of Angel describing what "being better" means to her.

Table 4.9

Angel's Excerpt about "Being Better"

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	What helps you?
Angel	2	Maybe because I want to be somebody
	3	I don't want to be a bum or something like
	4	I want to help my grandma out

In line 1 I asked Angel what helped her to want to go to college. In line 2 she stated she wants to go to college in order "to be somebody." This signaled that she has considered college as part of her future. In line 3 she stated she does not want to be a "bum or something like." She also stated (line 4) that she wanted to go to college to help her grandmother. For

Angel, college provides opportunities to be better and help her family. Her family's talk about opportunity is a support in keeping college a possibility for her.

To students "being better" means more than getting a college degree. For Angel and Karo "being better" is becoming a professional in order to be able to help their families. In table 4.13, line 4, Angel stated that in being better she will help her grandmother. She had discussed how she did not want to be a bum (line 2), but a reason for that is that she wants to help her grandmother. In table 4.6 (p. 67) Karo had also stated "I will have my career" to signal that she wants to go to college and get a career in order to help her mother. She stated, "I will have a career to help my mother" (line 8). Students' view of "being better" is going to college to be able to help their families financially. Angel is reminded by her family to "be better" and Karo knows she needs to "be better" in order to help the family. Both students want to be better because they know the consequences of not going to college. By families talking about opportunities to help the family if they have college education, students gain knowledge about the benefits of going to college.

Families talk to students about school information. Family members talked to students about educational opportunities they had in school. Maria's mother supported her by talking to Maria about different opportunities available in school. Throughout the interview, Maria kept mentioning different things her mother did to keep supporting her in her college pathway.

Maria's mother took action in Maria's college aspirations by being a parent volunteer in Maria's schools and gathering information about college preparatory classes. In table 4.10,

I have included an excerpt where Maria talked about how her mother is able to support her in her college going pathway by seeking information and being a parent volunteer.

Table 4.10

Maria's Excerpt: Mother's Ways of Supporting Maria's College Pathway

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	Who told you about dual enrollment classes?
Maria	2	…my mom
	3	She would always tell me get dual enrollment get dual enrollment
Researcher	4	And who would tell your mom about dual enrollment?
Maria	5	She gets information from everywhere
	6	She will go ask people
	7	See programs for summer to help me move along
Researcher	8	And where do you think she gets the information from
Maria	9	She is also a parent volunteer at Heights High School so they tell her there in meetings
	10	She has meetings everywhere in different schools and she gets it from there
	11	She'll go sign me up and tell me are you up to it and I'll say yeah

Maria's mother took action in Maria's college going aspiration by seeking information about the opportunities Maria had in school. In line 1 I asked Maria who had told her about dual enrollment classes. In line 2 Maria stated her mother was the one who gave her the information about college courses offered in school. In line 3 Maria repeated "get dual enrollment" and signaled to me that her mother told her more than once to enroll in dual enrollment classes. In line 4 I asked Maria who had told her mother about these courses. In lines 5-7 she stated different things her mother did to get information about these courses. In

line 5 Maria stated her mother gets information from everywhere by asking people. In line 6 Maria stated that her mother asked people for information for Maria. In line 7 Maria stated her mother will also find out information about summer programs which will help her "move along" her college pathway. This signaled Maria acknowledging her mother as a support for her college aspirations. Maria knew about dual enrollment classes because her mother constantly sought information for Maria. This indicated to me that Maria's mother went to different people and different places to get educational information for Maria's ongoing college aspirations.

Maria continues to want to go to college because her mother supports her by being a parent volunteer. In line 8 I asked Maria where her mother gets information. In line 10 Maria stated "she is also a parent volunteer." "Also" indicated that her mother had been a parent volunteer before. Here Maria expanded on information she had provided earlier to me about her mother being a parent volunteer since she was in elementary school. Maria stated that her mother attends meetings at Heights High School (line 9). In line 10 Maria stated her mother has meetings in different schools and therefore she can get information from multiple places. This line indicated that Maria's mother has been at schools other than Maria's current high school and is able to get information from different places. In line 11 Maria stated her mother signs her up for classes or programs and asked Maria if she wants to do it, to which Maria agrees. Line 11 indicated Maria understands that her mother supports her in her college pathway. Maria benefits from her mother being a parent volunteer and being able to get information needed for Maria to achieve goals.

Families' talks about opportunities have been instrumental in supporting students' college aspirations. Students were influenced by talks about "being better" and information

about school and becoming active in working toward their college goal. Students have been

successful in their schooling and continue actively pursuing their college aspirations with the

active support of family members. Family members became actors in students' college

pathways by providing supports through talks about consequences and opportunities. These

talks became influential in the students' decisions throughout their schooling experiences.

The information students had acquired from their families became funds of knowledge for

students.   In this way students were able to continue being active in acquiring additional

kinds of supports in the school and community contexts.

Schools' Ways of Supporting Student College Pathways

Students talked about how schools were able to support them in their college

pathways. Students became active agents by seeking supports available to them in schools.

Both the school personnel and the students constructed relationships and social networks

needed for students to continue on a college pathway. As represented in Figure 4.5, I have

identified four supports students said were available to them in school: 1) teachers

encouraging, 2) students participating in extracurricular activities 3) enrolling in college

preparatory classes and 4) school personnel helping students with college information.

Figure 4.5. Domain Analysis: Support Provided by School Personnel

Included Terms	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
Teachers encouraging		
Extracurricular activities		
College preparatory classes	is a kind of	Support provided by the school personnel
School personnel helping with college information		

82
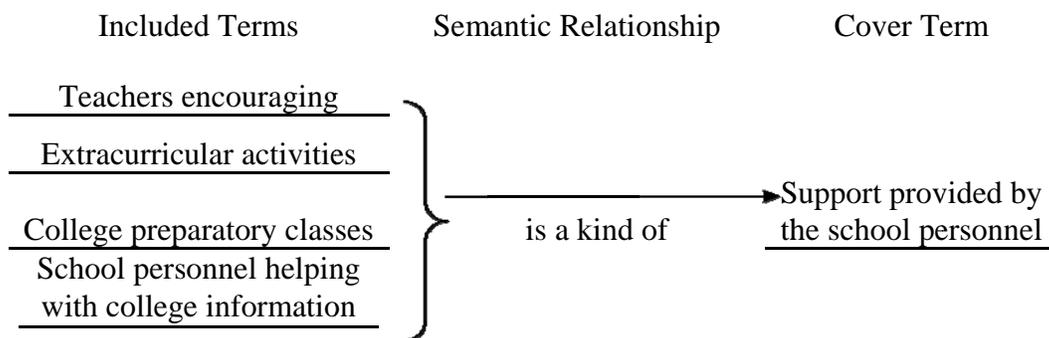
Each of the supports represented in Figure 4.5 were important for students in continuing on their college pathway. Throughout the interviews students talked about supports that helped them move forward. In the following sections I will discuss how school personnel provide support for students.

Teachers Encouraging: A Way of Supporting Students' College Pathways

Students identified teachers as ways in providing supports for their college aspirations Students said teachers often talked about college and encouraged them. In Table 4.11 I include an excerpt of Andres' interview, in which he talked about a teacher who encouraged him to do well in school and made herself available to talk about Andres' personal problems.

Table 4.11

Andres' Excerpt: Teachers' Ways of Supporting Students' College Pathways

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	…and have you had other teachers like that?
Andres	2	Yes my science teacher, Mrs. Ronald
Researcher	3	from what grade?
Andres	4	Ninth grade
Researcher	5	…how is she different from all the other teachers?
Andres	6	…she would never let us go down the drain like… you're doing bad…
	7	I had the confidence to speak to her
Researcher	8	…she would not just focus like on science…
	9	…she would help you with your own personal problems?
Andres	10	Yeah

In Table 3.5 (p. 47) I included an excerpt in which Andres had mentioned a reading teacher talking to him about college. Andres stated (line 2) that his science teacher had provided advice. In line 3, I asked Andres what grade he was in when he met this teacher. Andres says that it was a 9th grade teacher who supported him in high school (line 4). In line 5 I asked Andres how this science teacher was different from other teachers. In lines 6 and 7 Andres states that Mrs. Ronald does not allow them to "go down the drain."

In line 7 Andres states he has the "confidence" to approach his teacher. This statement in line (7) leads me to ask Andres if his teacher would talk to him about other topics besides science and if this teacher would help him with personal problems (lines 8 and 9). In line 10 Andres confirms that his science teacher not only helps him with science work and to do well in class, but she also helps him with his personal problems. Andres is able to approach her for help because he knows she will not allow him to fail. In this excerpt Andres talks about how he receives academic and personal advice from her teacher but does not mention his college decision. Talking with his teacher is a support he needs as a sophomore to continue wanting to go to college. In this excerpt Andres is alluding to an earlier conversation with me in the interview, where he shared about personal problems he has had to face throughout his schooling experience. Mrs. Ronald offers the support he needs to prevent him from giving up, failing or going "down the drain" (line 6). Andres continues in his college pathway because in school he has teachers who support him at both the personal and academic levels.

Like Andres, Karo also talked about a teacher who supported her in her college pathway. In Table 4.12, I include an excerpt from the interview with Karo where she talked about how a math teacher encouraged her to pursue a career.

Table 4.12

Karo's Excerpt: Teachers' Ways of Supporting Students' College Pathways

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	Did you tell your teacher you wanted to be a teacher?
Karo	2	Yes… I told him I wanted to major in mathematics and he said yes I see you as a teacher
	3	…He also told me I see you like an engineer you can go far…
	4	…and also my dance teacher…she sees me higher than a teacher

In speaking about supports available in school Karo had mentioned teachers encouraged her to pursue a career. In table 4.17, line 1, I asked Karo if she had told her teacher she wanted to become a teacher. Karo explained that she had told her math teacher she wanted to major in mathematics (line 2). In this same line she signaled that her teacher approved or supported her decision of becoming a teacher. In this excerpt Karo envisioned herself as a math teacher and her math teacher encourages her by telling her that he also envisions her as a math teacher. Karo had previously stated that her favorite subject was math and she was taking advanced placement courses with this teacher. In line 3 Karo stated that her teacher encouraged her to go even further by becoming an engineer. In line 4 Karo talked about her dance teacher also envisioning Karo as a professional. In this excerpt Karo signaled teachers encourage her and envision her as a professional. Karo is in her last year of high school and the encouragement she receives from the math and dance teacher makes Karo want to continue to go to college.

Teachers giving advice and encouraging students is a support students have used to continue on a college pathway. Teachers have offered support by allowing students to talk to them about students' personal and academic problems as well as by encouraging students to pursue a career (e.g., engineering). With these supports, students continue to move forward toward their goals, and enroll in programs and classes which provide information about college.

Extracurricular Activities: Schools' Way of Supporting Students' College Pathways

Throughout the interviews students implicitly indicated that they had enrolled in extracurricular activities as part of their ongoing decision to go to college. Students did not indicate explicitly that they know the importance of being involved in extracurricular activities. However, as a former high school teacher, I know that being involved in extracurricular activities may increase the chances to get accepted into a university. I have shared this information with the students and their parents. Students have a choice of enrolling and participating in extracurricular activities before, during and after school. In order for students to participate in extracurricular activities students must be passing all their classes. I have included an excerpt (see Table 4.13) of Dahvit's interview about joining extracurricular activities. In this excerpt he signals that he understands that being in band is important if he wants to major in music in college.

Table 4.13

Dahvit's Excerpt: Extracurricular activities

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	What made you join band?
Dahvit	2	…I like music…I have a passion for it now
Researcher	3	… you want to major in music
Dahvit	4	…I want to be a band director

I asked Dahvit why he had joined the high school band (line 1). In line 2 Dahvit stated that he likes music and that it is his passion. In line 3 I asked Dahvit if he wanted to major in music. In line 4 Dahvit signaled he had selected a career, and he wants to become a band director. Dahvit selected band as his extracurricular activity to gain the knowledge to pursue his passion for music. It was through this activity that Dahvit was able to continue to want to go to college and develop an interest in a specific career. Earlier in the interview Dahvit had mentioned he had joined band when he was in 6th grade. By 12th grade music had become Dahvit's passion and he wants to make it a career. Schools which offer these kinds of extracurricular activities allow students to select what they like and support them in their college going pathways. Schools can also offer college preparatory classes as a way of supporting students' college aspirations.

College Preparatory Classes: Schools' Way of Supporting Students' College Pathways

Throughout the interviews, students indicated they had enrolled in college preparatory classes. Advanced placement (AP) and dual enrollment are classes available for all students.

AP courses are to help students succeed in college. These courses prepare students to take an AP exam. If students pass this exam, they receive college credit.

Students in a dual enrollment course are participating at two local institutions, their high school and their town's university. These courses are for students to get a head start on their college careers. Students may even graduate from their high school with an Associate's degree. Both AP and dual enrollment classes are more rigorous than traditional courses and focus on preparing students for college. Students in this study knew of these opportunities and took them up. Once students had started thinking about college, they selected classes to get prepared for college.

In a prior conversation, Andres told me that he knew the challenge he would face by enrolling in more AP classes. At the time of the interview he was taking AP math, but was planning to enroll in more AP classes the following year. When I asked Andres why he was taking AP courses he said, "It's gonna help me…like prepare me for college." In this statement Andres indicates that he knows taking these courses will better prepare him for college. Earlier he had mentioned he wanted a higher grade point average (GPA) to apply to a university out of town. Andres enrolled in AP courses to help him continue to want to go to college.

As previously discussed, Kike had started thinking about college early on. In his interview he told me that he knew he had to take AP classes to get better prepared for college. Kike also knew that AP classes weigh more towards the GPA and therefore he enrolled in AP classes to have a higher GPA. I asked Kike how many AP courses he was taking as a senior. Kike stated he was enrolled in English, History and Pre-Calculus AP courses. Students have

more opportunities of getting accepted in universities by having a high GPA. By enrolling in

AP courses Kike is being proactive in his college going aspirations.

Karo is also proactive in her college pathway. Previously in the interview, I had asked

Karo who had helped her to do well in school and she had mentioned her pre-calculus AP

teacher and her dance teacher (table 4.17). Enrolling in AP courses and joining

extracurricular activities for Karo is instrumental in her college-going pathway. On several

occasions she mentioned math was her favorite subject, thus she would like to become a math

teacher or an engineer. She also knows the benefits of enrolling in a college preparatory class.

She stated "I know I can get accepted (college) automatically because they (university) accept

top five percent and top ten percent students …and I am top five percent." Karo indicated

that she has been strategic in enrolling in AP math courses and extracurricular activities. She

enrolled to get a higher GPA and increase her chances getting accepted into universities.

Like Karo, Maria was also strategic in her decision to go to college. In a previous

conversation Maria stated she wanted to become a pediatrician and sought for admittance into

a high school which offered medical classes. She enrolled in pre-AP classes in middle school

to increase her chances of getting accepted into Heights High School. Once Maria got

accepted to the pre-medical program in her high school, her mother got her information about

dual enrollment classes (Table 4.14). Maria signaled she agreed to take dual enrollment

classes when her mother signed her up to take them Table 4.14, (line 11). Maria knows that

dual enrollment classes are much more challenging than traditional courses. However, she

stated, "but it is worth it and I got them."

Students enrolled in extracurricular activities and college preparatory classes

(advanced placement, dual enrollment) in order to work toward their college aspirations.

Students took action by registering in these classes geared to prepare students for college. Students also enrolled in extracurricular activities in preparing for their future college goal. Students indicated they were aware that participating in extracurricular activities and enrolling in college preparatory classes can increase their opportunities to get accepted into college. Both the school and the student took actions in the students' college aspirations.

Help with College Information: Schools' Way of Supporting Students' College Pathways

Another support offered by the school was done through the actions the school personnel took on behalf of the students. Throughout the interviews, students talked about how school personnel have gone beyond their duties in helping them gain access to college. Both Dahvit and Kike received scholarships to universities through help and active involvement of their teachers. In table 4.14, I have included an excerpt where Dahvit indicated he had applied for a music scholarship.

Table 4.14

David's Excerpt

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	Why do you say hopefully… go to college?
Dahvit	2	…Well I am waiting on scholarship or something…I am going to audition in December for a music scholarship

In response the question tell me about yourself, Dahvit stated he "hopefully" would be the first one to go to college. I asked Dahvit why he had stated "hopefully go to college" (line 1). In line 2 Dahvit responds that he would be auditioning for a music scholarship to enter a local university to pursue his goal of becoming a band director. In a member-checking

conversation I had with Dahvit after the interview, he explained more on the topic of the music scholarship. I did not record this conversation on audio but wrote down the head notes afterwards. Dahvit stated that his band director had visited a local university to talk to the music director about Dahvit. Because of the contact the teacher made with the university's music director, Dahvit had an opportunity to audition for a music scholarship. The teacher also helped Dahvit complete the application and get it to the university admissions office. The band director went beyond his duties of teaching music in school. He helped Dahvit with his aspirations of going to college and later becoming a band director. Dahvit's band director provided the support Dahvit needed as a senior in high school. Dahvit later shared with me that he was given the music scholarship and is currently enrolled in college.

A migrant teacher was one of the school support systems Kike was able to use to pursue his college aspirations. This migrant teacher helped Kike get a scholarship to an out-of-state university. In table 4.15 I have included an excerpt of Kike's interview about his migrant teacher helping him gain access to an out-of-state university.

Table 4.15

Kike's Excerpt

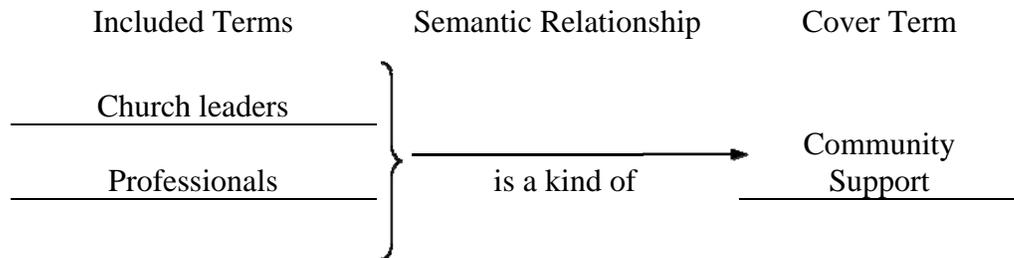| Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	How did the school help you by being a migrant student?
Kike	2	…they helped me a lot…supplies…Mrs. Sepulveda…
Researcher	3	…how would she help you? To get into the university…the math…it was the math one to qualify…
Kike	4	and thanks to her I was able to take it cause I went to her room
Researcher	5	Is she your migrant teacher?
Kike	6	Yes…She calls me telling me about events…about the future…I went to do like voluntary work…

In the interview Kike had told me he was a migrant student. I asked Kike how the school had helped him as a migrant student (line 1). Kike signaled the program had helped him in different ways (line 2). Through this program he received supplies and was assigned a migrant teacher, Mrs. Sepulveda. I asked how Mrs. Sepulveda had helped him. Kike stated Mrs. Sepulveda had helped him get into a university (line 4) by helping him with the math college entrance exam. He had gone to Mrs. Sepulveda to get the extra help he needed to do well on the math exam.

Schools were active participants in students continuing to want to go to college. Students gained college access with the help of educators, activities, classes and programs. Students gained social capital (e.g., knowledge about school and skills to take tests) through the school's support. School personnel went beyond their normal duties to help students complete college applications. Students were able to use their social networks and social capital in order to continue on their college pathways.

Communities' Ways of Supporting Student College Pathways

In addition to family and school supports, community support was also instrumental for students in shaping their college pathways. In Table 3.7 I had listed three supports mentioned by my participants: family, school, and community. In Figure 4.6 I show a domain analysis of two community supports students talked about throughout the interviews: 1) church leaders and 2) professionals.

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Figure 4.6. Community Supports

Included Terms   Semantic Relationship   Cover Term

Church leaders
                                                        Community
Professionals   is a kind of   Support

In the following section I discuss ways church leaders and professionals were a support in students' college aspirations.

Church leaders in the Community: Ways of Supporting Students' College Pathways

Four students indicated that they had support from church leaders. Students said they engaged in conversations about personal issues with members of the church and were able to continue focusing on their goal to go to college. Church members provided support through conversations with students and through sharing about their own past experiences (Figure 4.7) church leaders enabled students to relate to those experiences and to see a way forward.

Figure 4.7. Church Leaders' Support

Included Terms   Semantic Relationship   Cover Term

Conversations
                                                        Support provided by
Past experiences   is a kind of   church leaders
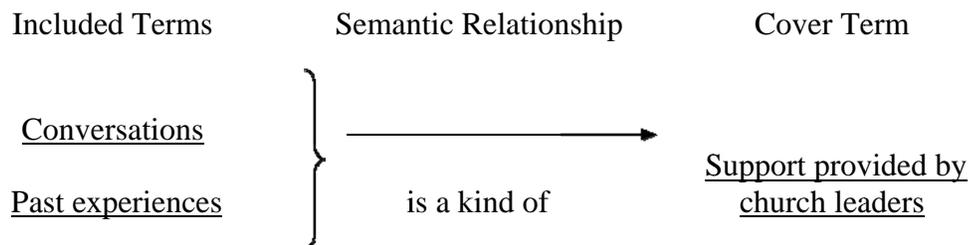
Conversations with church leaders: Ways of supporting students' college pathways. I

used Kike's interview to discuss how a conversation with a church leader provided a support

for Kike's college aspirations. In Table 4.16 I have included an excerpt of Kike's recount of

his conversation with a church leader.

Table 4.16

Kike's Excerpt: Conversation with Church Leader

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	Is there a friend a peer that helps you?
Kike	2	…it was Antonio…I was talking to him and I was like man this dude knows what I'm talking about
	3	Like he know how I feel about you know being broke…involved in drugs and stuff…
	4	…he is someone I can talk to and he'll talk to me
Researcher	5	…do you think going to church has helped you stay focused?
Kike	6	Yeah…I mean…you start getting older more opportunities are presented to you to make easy money and
	7	…I was real tempted..but talking to Antonio and you know he telling me he had an experience…I'd be like nahh I can get arrested

In response to my question (line 1), Kike indicated Antonio had helped him (line 2).

Earlier in the interview Kike had talked about Antonio, the youth leader at the church Kike

attended. In line 2 Kike stated that he talks to Antonio and that Antonio knows what Kike is

talking about. Kike signaled that Antonio understands Kike's situation. Kike shared with me

about what types of conversations he has had with Antonio (line 3). Kike has talked to

Antonio about "being broke" and "involved in drugs." He also stated that Antonio knows

how he (Kike) feels about going through these situations.   In line 4 Kike stated that Antonio

is someone he can talk to and Antonio talks to him. This line signaled that Kike and Antonio engage in conversations about Kike's difficulties. In line 7 I asked Kike if going to church helped him stay focused in school. In line 6 he responded that yes, church did help him stay focused, because as he gets older he is faced with more opportunities to make easy money. With this statement, Kike connects his response to line 3 where he had indicated what difficult situations he has to deal with. In line 7 he states he has been tempted in giving in to drugs and making easy money. In this same line he states that talking to Antonio and knowing about Antonio's experience, Kike decides not to give in to making easy money because he will get arrested. Kike does not mention his college aspirations in this excerpt, but he does state that these conversations with Antonio help him stay focused in school and not give in to the temptations.

Church leaders sharing past experiences: Ways of supporting students' college pathways. Students indicated that church leaders have been a support when students were able to relate to the leaders' past experience. I have included in Table 4.17 an excerpt of Dahvit's interview. After he had mentioned his band director as a person who helps him move forward in his college pathway, Dahvit also talked about his Sunday school teacher.

Table 4.17

Dahvit's Excerpt: Sunday School Teacher

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Researcher	1	…who else helps you figure out what you want to do?
Dahvit	2	My Sunday school teacher
	3	…My second grade year I started going to church and she has been there
	4	She motivates us and…
Researcher	5	How does she motivate you?
Dahvit	6	Well she goes to school
	7	Her life is an example
	8	She keeps me motivated like her life her testimony
	9	She has a really good life, family, she has a career
	10	and she talks to us …when we get off
Researcher	11	How do you identify with her?
Dahvit	12	Projects…she tells us that when she was small she wanted to have a good life
	13	She wanted to break the cycle…like having a family like a mom and dad and like I don't have my dad with me
	14	I identify myself with her and she was like the first one to graduate and go to college

This excerpt represents a part of the interview in which I asked Dahvit about who helped him figure out what to do in as he moves forward on his college pathway (line 1). In line 2 Dahvit identified his Sunday school teacher. Dahvit answered he has known his Sunday school teacher since he was in second grade and she has been there for him since then (line 2). Dahvit explained what "being there" means to him (line 4). By using the word "us" Dahvit indicated that his Sunday school teacher motivates him and others in his class. I ask Dahvit to elaborate on how his Sunday school teacher motivates him (line 5). Dahvit stated that his teacher goes to school (line 6) and for him her life is an example (line 7). In line 8 he mentions he is motivated by her testimony. This indicated that the Sunday school teacher has

shared information which motivates Dahvit. In line 9 Dahvit described what his Sunday school teacher's life looks like from his perspective. He mentioned three things that motivate him: good life, a family, and a career. With these words Dahvit indicated these are things he would like to have.
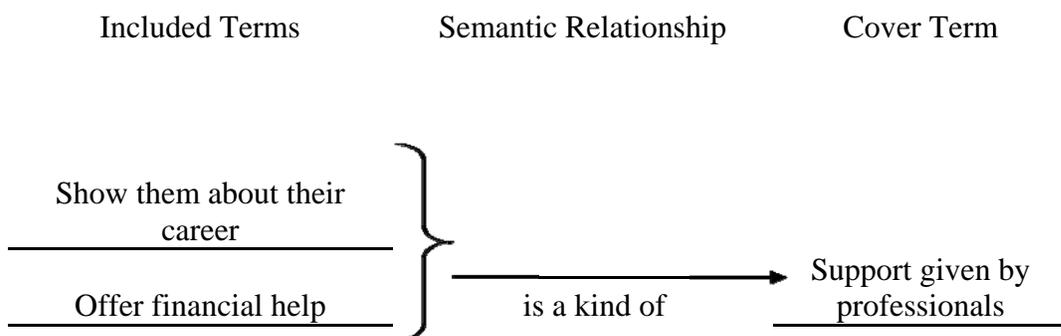
He stated that she also talks to them when they "get off" (line 10). Dahvit signaled that at times he is not doing well but his Sunday school teacher talks to him and others and keeps them motivated. I asked Dahvit how he identified with his teacher (line 11). In line 12 Davhit mentioned the "projects" and "when she was small," thus indicating that his teacher lived in the projects when she was young but wanted to have a "good life." Dahvit repeated "good life" signaling this is what he wants (line 12). Here he alluded to the prior interview segment in which he shared about how his mother has to get help from the government and about how he does not want his children to go through what he has gone through (analyzed in Table 4.1). Dahvit stated that his Sunday school teacher has talked about how she wanted to "break the cycle" (line 13). He explained what cycle she was referring to: she did not have a father. In this line (13) he stated he does not have his father either and this to him means not having a family. He signaled that he wants to break the cycle and have a family. Dahvit concluded this excerpt stating that he identifies with her because she was the first one to graduate and go to college and he would also be the first one in his family to do this (line 14).

In this excerpt Dahvit signaled that he is motivated by his Sunday school teacher's past experiences. Dahvit is motivated by identifying himself with the teacher and knowing that he can also break the cycle and graduate and go to college. Dahvit is able to relate to the teacher's personal and academic past experiences. Dahvit has been able to use this support to continue to stay focused on his college-going aspirations.

Professionals in the Community: Ways of supporting Students' College Pathways

Throughout the interviews students mentioned professionals from the community who had been a support to keep them moving forward on their college pathways. I represent in Figure 4.8 two ways professionals have supported students: 1) showing them about their career and 2) offering financial help.

Figure 4.8. Ways Professionals Support Students

Included Terms　　　　　Semantic Relationship　　　　Cover Term

Show them about their
career

Offer financial help　　　　　　is a kind of　　　　Support given by
professionals

Throughout the interviews, students indicated that the supports they received from professions from the community were important in continuing on their college pathway.

Professionals show students about their career. In a previous table (4.4) I included an excerpt of an interview where Maria talked about the first time she started thinking about college. Maria talked about how a children's doctor showed her around the hospital. Maria, while in third grade, was given the opportunity to see what a children's doctor does. The doctor showed her what things he does that are fun to a patient and how to take care of them. Maria was able to start thinking about college and take an interest in the medical field. In

addition to sharing the information, the doctor made an impact on Maria's decision to go to college by offering her financial support. The professional doctor showing the perspectives of his work made a lasting impact on Maria. Because of the doctor's actions to show her around and talk with her, as well as the doctor's work in saving her cousin, since third grade Maria was able to think about college and take actions to prepare for it.

In table 4.18 I have included an excerpt of Maria's interview in which she told me the doctor offered her financial support.

Table 4.18

Maria's Excerpt: Offers Financial Help

Person speaking	Line number	Statement
Maria	1	…I said I want to be like you
	2	…He said go ahead and whenever you are going to get into college call me so I can give you scholarships…
Researcher	3	…Did you keep his information?
Maria	4	yes

Professionals offer financial help. Maria stated she told the doctor she wanted to be like him, a children's doctor (line 1). Maria stated that the doctor told her to "go ahead" (line 2). He encouraged her to pursue the career and he made himself available by asking Maria to call when she was ready to enter college. In line 2 Maria said that the doctor offered to give her scholarships to support her goal of becoming a doctor. I asked Maria if she had kept the doctor's information and she said yes (line 3). In a previous conversation Maria had stated that she met this doctor when she was in third grade. As a freshman in high school Maria holds on to the doctor's information and says she will look for him. This doctor became a

support for Maria by showing her what a children's doctor does and by offering her financial support.

Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and professionals in the community have been instrumental in supporting students' college aspirations. Students indicated that community leaders in churches had supported them by engaging in conversations with students and by sharing their past experiences to which the students could relate. Professionals also supported students by showing students what professionals do and by offering financial support. Students continued on their college pathway by using the community as social networks by turning the information they received from community members into social capital.

Discussion

In using funds of knowledge and social capital theories I was able to examine how first-generation Hispanic high school students decided they wanted to go to college. Findings indicate that for these students deciding to attend college was more than one moment in time. Students started thinking about going to college through a personal experience either in a school context or an out of school context. This thought was kept alive and ongoing through family, school, and community supports.

In Figure 4.9, I represent the funds of knowledge students gained from families talking to them about different topics. Families talked about opportunities students could have if they attended college. They also offered talks about consequences for not going to college. Families generated this knowledge about their own life history and shared it with adolescents.

Figure 4.9. Families' Funds of Knowledge
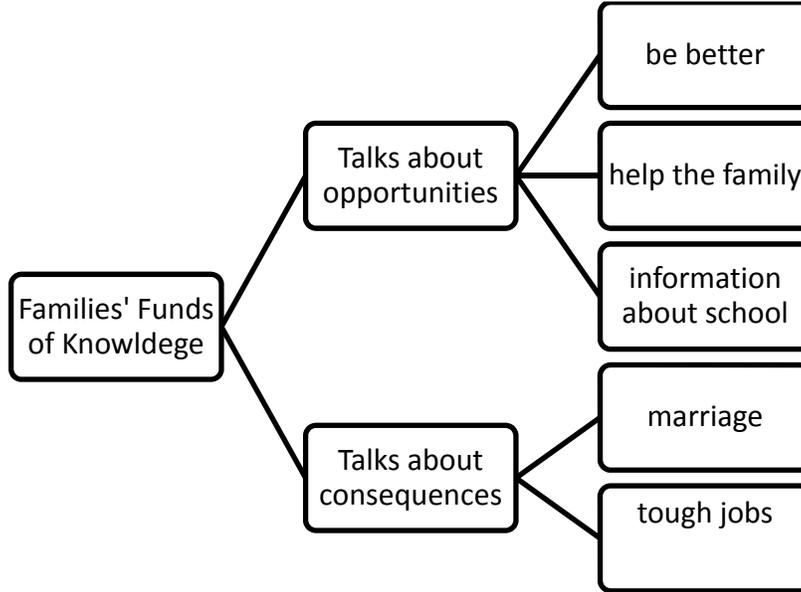
Students talked about ways families (mothers, fathers, grandmothers, aunts and

uncles) generated funds of knowledge which helped students continue on a college pathway.

Through families' life and labor histories students gained understanding about the importance

of college. Families were able to generate, obtain and distribute knowledge about real life

experiences. Adolescents' households became a context of learning and strengthening their

college aspirations. The members of the family actively engaged in diverse talks with

students and gave them local and global knowledge about life without a college degree.

Families experiencing consequences for not going to college (getting help from the

government, limited schooling, working minimum-wage jobs) enabled students to envision

themselves in the future. Students wanted different consequences for themselves. They

became college-going students through acquiring new funds of knowledge. Students and

families were actively involved in creating their college pathways. The funds of knowledge

enabled students to become strategic and acquire other kinds of supports. As ways of

obtaining support for their college pathways, students enrolled in classes, programs and activities in the context of the school and community.

Through schools (educators, activities and programs) and communities (church leaders and professionals) first-generation Hispanic high school students were able to gain social capital to continue wanting to go to college. Social capital means new ways of students looking at their own life. Stanton-Salazar (1997) emphasizes the need to understand the schooling experiences of minority youth. He (1997) argues further that social capital is formed from the relationships with school personnel. Minority students' schooling experiences were shaped through social capital acquired in school and in the community. Even though my participants were from low social economic status, from families with limited schooling and with no prior college history in the family the social capital acquired supported students through their process of deciding to go to college.

The families, school personnel and community leaders enhanced college opportunities for minority students. Students gained new knowledge, skills and resources which helped them continue to want to go to college. Students also gained understanding to their problems and received support and advice. Families, educators and community leaders offered educational and moral support students needed in their college going pathways. These supports became a network for first-generation Hispanic high school students.

Students were able to gain university access through the social networks. Stanton-Salazar (1997) argues that personal access to valued resources and opportunities is obtained through social networks. Some social acts needed to gain access to resources and opportunities are through the social acts of "help-seeking" and "help-giving" (Boissevain,

1974 as cited in Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 4). In Table 4.10 I represented the kinds of social

networks each student acquired.

Figure 4.10. Students' Social Networks
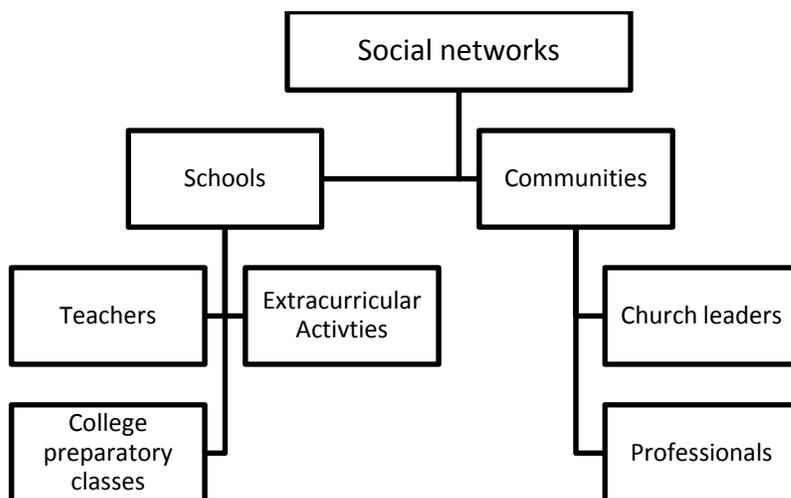
In Figure 4.10, I represent the social networks students mentioned throughout the

interviews. Students networked in school with teachers, extracurricular activities, and college

preparatory classes. Students also indicated they had networked with church leaders and

professionals from the community.

One student (Angel) did not acquire or use the social networks at the school therefore

she did not gain any social capital from school. The rest of the students sought help from

school personnel, programs activities and community members. The relationship students

created with these networks constitute social capital for each student. The findings indicate

that students (actors) achieving their educational interests depends on the support given by the

social networks (school and community). Students sought for social networks. These

networks helped and supported students to continue moving forward toward their college

goal. In interpreting the data indicated that only one student (Angel) did not signal being an active participant in the college-going process. As a junior in high school her only social network is the community leader (see table 3.8). The rest of the participants have been actors in shaping their own future and have acquired social capital through the different social networks. The social networks acquired by the students were instrumental in their schooling experiences because these networks empowered them with information and resources they needed in their college-going process.

In the next chapter I provide a discussion about the topic of first-generation Hispanic high school students deciding to go to college. I discuss the findings in relationship to the literature presented in chapters one and two. The implications I provide are for students, families, school personnel and members of the community. I also provide directions for future research. This study ends with final thoughts about the topic, and a description of first steps I've taken to apply this study's findings to the elementary school campus where I currently work.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore factors that have contributed to first generation high school students deciding to attend college and continuing on this pathway throughout their schooling experiences. In chapter one I discussed the need to study first generation Hispanic high school students' perspectives. Research has provided evidence regarding the low levels of achievement (Martinez et al., 2004), the high dropout rates (Kimball, 2005), and low college enrollment rates (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Gandara &Bial, 2001) among Hispanics. According to Inman and Mayes (1999), understanding what helps first-generation students succeed despite any obstacles they face can allow educators to improve program development, recruiting, retention, and graduation efforts for all students and especially for minorities.

 This study contributes to the literature about factors that promote Hispanic students' success (Martinez et al., 2004) and college transitions. Most studies on first generation students had focused on college students, but few studies exist about high school students and their college going pathways. This study addresses this gap in literature by providing information about experiences and supports first generation high school students consider important in their college aspirations.

I have identified five primary findings which make visible the importance of students, families, and communities constructing a wide variety of opportunities to support students in making and pursuing decisions to attend college. First, families provided funds of knowledge

on which students could build to decide to go to college. Second, the actions of students I interviewed made visible how deficits and challenges they face can become funds of knowledge for their college decisions. Third, students demonstrated the importance of resources they needed to access and develop the social capital needed to pursue their college aspirations. Fourth, students made visible how everyone, including family, school personnel, and community members became active participants in supporting and promoting student high school success and college aspirations. Fifth, students have indicated that deciding to go to college extends beyond a single moment in time and involves an ongoing process.

Finding 1. Families' Funds of Knowledge: A Way to Support Students' College Pathways

This study shows that families supported student college aspirations through funds of knowledge. My study provides insights about how schools, families, and communities, which in research are often seen as not prepared to address the needs of the minority population (Martinez et al., 2004), are in fact providing key resources to support student college aspirations. Throughout the interviews students indicated ways families, schools and community members supported them. Families talked to students about the opportunities they could have if they went to college. Families were able to talk to them about the consequences for not going to college and showed them how minimum wage jobs such as construction can be "tough." Students also learned the consequences for getting married before going to college. These talks became funds of knowledge that students used to continue on their college going pathway.

Students were able to use these funds of knowledge provided by their families to envision the future different from the past their family members were describing. The

openness, candid comments and support of families supported students along their college pathways. Students saw themselves as parents and understood the life they would have if they chose not to go to college. Students became determined to become professionals with a career and to obtain a job in order to "be better" and help the family. To students "being better" was not only going to college, it was going to college, obtaining a career, and helping the family.

My study expands the theory of funds of knowledge by showing that students can construct their own funds of knowledge and do not need to rely only on teacher ability to gage their families' funds to be used in school. Gonzalez et al. (2005) focus on teachers using the funds of knowledge students bring to school in order to empower students and provide instruction to which students can relate. The funds of knowledge theory places the responsibility on the teachers and the schools to understand the funds of knowledge students bring. However, this study makes visible that students were able to use their own funds of knowledge that transcended the classroom setting. I discovered that the students I interviewed were not dependent on teachers or knowledge from the past, but were able to construct their own learning and funds of knowledge which shaped their college going decisions throughout their schooling experiences. This study shows that students are able to draw on different kinds of resources available to construct knowledge and navigate the complex systems of which they are part. Students draw on the knowledge from different resources, not just from their families. Students used their funds of knowledge as a resource which shaped their college pathway and their future. Students were able to mediate between school and community by acquiring new relationships with schools and community members.

Finding 2: Deficits Become Funds of Knowledge

The students in my study demonstrated that their families' knowledge, experiences, actions, and resources became the funds of knowledge students could use as supports for their college going aspirations. This study challenges the deficit views which focus on what minority and first generation students lack and cannot do. Nieto & Bode (2008) state that deficit views place complete responsibility for children's failure on their homes and families, attributing student struggles in school to the weight of familial deficit and dysfunctions. The deficit models also claim that minority students' opportunities for school success and college enrollment are limited (Nieto & Bode, 2008). While the students I interviewed did talk about their own and their families' difficult economic and life situations, they focused on the resources, not the constraints, they had available. Students also revealed how the difficulties and "deficits" became opportunities for their college aspirations.

The findings of my study indicate that first-generation high school students faced difficulties but often used difficult experiences to construct their own funds of knowledge for educational success. They did not become victims of their environment. The adolescents I talked to did not consider dropping out of school as an option. They took actions in constructing college possibilities for themselves. Students juxtaposed the knowledge of consequences of their current situation (e.g. low SES, single-parent home, sick family members, parents working minimum wage jobs, and parents with limited schooling) with their understanding of possibilities a college degree provides. Through this juxtaposition students were able to envision a different future, and college as a way to that future.

By contrasting their current situation with future possibilities, students like Dahvit, Kike and Karo gained college awareness by wanting to "break the cycle" of "being a nobody"

or a "bum" and decide to go to college. Students stated they wanted a better future and wanted to help their families financially. This finding indicates that not all difficulties hinder students' college aspirations. This study made visible that in adversity students became resilient and became college-going students. Students used their difficult experiences to construct their funds of knowledge to advance and become better by deciding to go to college.

Finding 3: The Importance of Social Capital in Pursuing a College Aspiration

Students indicated the importance of becoming proactive in seeking resources in order to move them forward in their college pathway. Literature indicates that a factor that influences dropout rates among minority students is the low access to staff and inadequacy of resources to promote and support students' success in schools (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). Despite the difficulties students faced, they sought and gained social capital (knowledge, skills, resources and encouragement) from the social networks they did have and developed in school.

This study confirms social capital theories which emphasize the importance of social capital as resources found within a group or network Bourdieu (1986). Stanton–Salazar & Dornbush (1995) who applied Bourdieu's social capital theories to argue that social capital is formed from relationships with school personnel. Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) also emphasized the importance of social networks in order for individuals to increase their knowledge. The students in my study demonstrated that they used a variety of networks and resources within and outside of school to develop the social capital they needed to maintain their college aspirations. They showed that despite the limited resources available, students can find ways to develop the social capital they need to go to college. Students used social

networks at school, in their families and in the community to develop understandings about the importance of college and to develop networks needed to move forward in their college going pathway. Social capital included college information, help filling out college applications and encouragement. The social capital, the networks, and the funds of knowledge became valued resources and opportunities that first generation Hispanic high school students needed to continue on their college pathways.

Finding 4: Students, Families, School Personnel and Communities Taking Actions

In this study students, families, school personnel and members of the community took actions throughout students' college pathways. Bloome et al. (2005) claim that people are influenced by factors around them and that people are active agents in the worlds in which they live.   Bloome and colleagues (2005) further argue that when people are able to analyze their current situation, they become strategic. My study supports Bloome and colleagues' (2005) argument by emphasizing the importance of the active agency of students, family members, school personnel, and community members. I demonstrated how students had the ability to "analyze the social and economic situation in which they lived" (Bloome et al., 2005, p. 4) and became efficacious in shaping their future by seeking help from families, schools and communities. Students, families, school personnel, and community members became active agents in students' decisions to go to college. Families, schools and communities also took an active role and influenced students in their college-going process.

Families became active agents in students' college aspirations. In Maria's case, her mother supported her college aspirations by becoming a parent volunteer at her school, attending school meetings, and talking to Maria about college preparatory classes. Parents

talked to students and provided information which kept them in their process of going to college. Families became instrumental in shaping students' college pathways. When students faced difficulties of not knowing how to enroll in a college preparatory class, apply for a scholarship, or enroll in a university, families, school personnel, and community members in conjunction with the students became proactive in obtaining the social capital needed to move forward. Students used the funds of knowledge constructed in their family environments by their families and became strategic by seeking other social networks.

School personnel also were active agents in students' college pathways. In Dahvit's case, his band director became strategic in helping Dahvit get a music scholarship by talking to the university's personnel. At the same time, Dahvit was proactive in his own college pathway by seeking the help of the band director to find ways to pursue a music degree. Kike also took actions by seeking tutoring help for a college entrance exam from his migrant teacher. The migrant teacher actively promoted Kike's college aspirations by tutoring him on a college entrance exam. Both Kike and Dahvit were accepted to a four-year university.

Teachers were proactive in promoting student college aspirations by talking to them about the importance of college and encouraging students to go beyond a bachelor's degree. Teachers envisioned students as professionals. Karo talked about how her teachers told her she had the ability to become an engineer or anything she wanted. Andres' teacher talked to him about having the opportunity of becoming an engineer and even obtaining a doctoral degree. Students were motivated and encouraged by their teachers. Students sought social networks (e.g., teachers and band directors) and gained the social capital (e.g. motivation and encouragement, scholarships, and college acceptance) with the help of their teachers.

In addition to families and school personnel, members of the community took actions in supporting students' college aspirations. Students became proactive by using the supports available in the community. Angel, Dahvit, and Kike sought support and encouragement from their church community. Through talking to the Sunday school teacher Dahvit was able to identify with her and use her life example as a motivation to continue on his college pathway. Dahvit's Sunday school teacher shared with him about her childhood and family history. Like Dahvit, Kike also sought support from his youth leader at his local church. The youth leader talked to Kike about his experience with drugs and making easy money. Kike stated that this leader's example helped him overcome temptation. Kike, Dahvit and Angel gained social capital through interactions with community members who shaped students' ongoing decision to go to college.

In addition to students, families, school personnel, and church personnel, professionals in the community also took an active role in students' college aspirations. Maria gained a network (doctor) in a children's hospital. Maria started thinking about college because a doctor went beyond his normal duties and showed Maria how a doctor takes care of patients. Maria took actions by talking to the doctor and the doctor took an active role in motivating Maria and offering her support for college.

Students, families, schools and communities took actions in shaping students' decisions to go to college. Literature often blames families, schools and communities for not being prepared to address the needs of minority students. The results of the study indicate that not only were these supports available but students created social networks and acquired the capital needed to want to go to college.

In interviewing students who have decided to go to college, I have found that the idea

to go to college started with a particular experience inside or outside of school. However, the

idea of college was not a single moment of decision but a process that needed to be

continuously sustained. In Figure 5.1 I represent the college going process students made

visible as they talked about family supports and funds of knowledge, networks they used, and

resources, knowledge and skills they developed as social capital to continue pursuing college

aspirations throughout their schooling experiences.

The college-going process started with decisions students made through personal

experiences inside or outside of school. They then drew on their families' funds of knowledge

and constructed their own understandings about the importance of college. Once students had

the knowledge about the importance of college, they networked with people inside and

outside of school. By drawing on and constructing funds of knowledge and by developing

social networks, students acquired an array of capital needed to continue to move forward on

their college-going pathway. This process was on-going throughout their schooling

experience.

Figure 5.1. College-Going Process
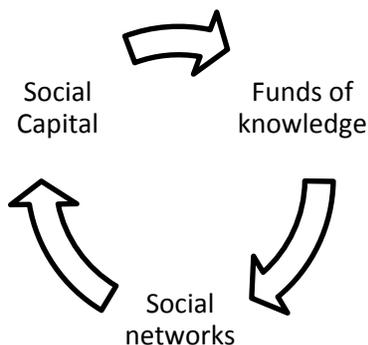
The college-going process began with students thinking about going to college through the knowledge they had gained from their families' experiences. For example, Dahvit indicated that he started thinking about college during a middle school career day. During this career day, Dahvit turned his embarrassment about his mother not being a professional into a decision to attend college. Dahvit envisioned himself in the future and did not want his children to feel embarrassed about him not having a college degree. This vision of his future shaped Dahvit's decision to go to college. He was able to transform his embarrassment of his mother not being a professional into knowledge about the importance of college.

Students maintained their college-going thought by networking with school personnel and members of the community. Students talked about having multiple supports that fostered their college-going aspirations. Students networked with teachers, counselors, youth leaders and professionals. The college-going process became on-going by students becoming proactive in acquiring different supports in and out of school. Students' actions included enrolling in college preparatory classes and listening to talks from school personnel and the members of the community. As students navigated through these networks and took actions in pursuing their college aspirations, they acquired social capital to move them forward on their college pathway.

Once students had made decisions to go to college and took actions in developing social networks that could support their college-going process, students started developing the social capital they needed to move forward. Students obtained knowledge from teachers and counselors about college preparatory classes and learned skills such as applying for college

admission and scholarships. Students also indicated receiving encouragement about their academic potential and talks about the possibilities for obtaining a college degree.

Students indicated that deciding to go to college began with an experience in or outside of school but was kept alive through different kinds of supports. Some students decided to go to college early on and this decision required them to become proactive in obtaining support from families, educators and community members in order to continue fostering the idea of going to college.

Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study indicate that families played an instrumental role in shaping students' decisions to go to college. Given that much literature focuses on what the families lack and are not able to provide, further research is needed to examine the variety of ways in which families do support high school students in school and promote their college aspirations. Interviewing families would provide their insights and perspectives and would make visible how families construct funds of knowledge for and with their children. By interviewing members of first generation Hispanic high school students' families, researchers may be able to show how the families' actions provide the foundation which shapes students' pathways to and through college. Additionally, interviews with family members could explore what families view as supports for their adolescents and how family and student views converge or diverge. By involving families and by focusing on what families know and can do to support high school students, research could potentially impact these families and enable them to see their strengths.

In addition to interviewing family members, further research could include home visits (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and observations to examine what student-family interactions look like on a continuous basis. By doing fieldwork in family homes overtime, researchers could potentially uncover sources of family knowledge and perspectives and how this knowledge shapes family relationships with their high school age children. By exploring family funds of knowledge, it may be possible to show how sociocultural contexts shape opportunities and constraints for family involvement in children's education and college aspirations.

If researchers conduct their studies through participatory designs with family members, families can also benefit in learning about their social contexts and ways to transcend and transform those contexts (Freire, 1998). Research that considers family funds of knowledge and how students and families shape each other's perspectives and possibilities could provide insights into the richness of resources on which families of first generation Hispanic students draw in order to support student success.

An additional study relating to families may investigate what counts as family to a Hispanic high school student and how different members of a family play different roles in the adolescent's growth and education. Many of my student participants lived or interacted with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. These intergenerational relationships may be affecting the way students construct their own lives and futures. A study about ways Hispanic high school students understand family and draw on intergenerational family resources may contribute information about ways different family members may be able to support student school and college success. Given that my participants lived in a border town and talked about family as including parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, it may be important to investigate whether this understanding of family and family involvement is unique to the

border region or the Hispanic community more generally. Examining the cross-generational resources extended family members provide for first-generation high school students may yield useful information about ways of promoting family involvement and supporting student college aspirations.

In this study I uncovered that, in addition to families and school personnel, members of the community were instrumental in shaping the college pathways of first generation high school students. It would be beneficial to students and all stakeholders to develop studies which investigate the role community members (e.g., church leaders and professionals) play in high school students' educational aspirations. Carrying out a qualitative study which focuses on the actions and perspectives of community members would provide an opportunity for members of the community to reveal their perspectives on ways of supporting first generation Hispanic high school students. While community members may not be aware of the impact they might have on students from even one interaction, research with professionals, church leaders, and others who interact with high school students may reveal what community members see as their role in promoting and supporting college access for first generation students.

While this study provided useful information about first-generation high school students' perspectives on what supports their college aspirations, the study is based on interviews with six participants. For future study a larger group could be selected using additional criteria, for example, maximum variation of student grades and/or types of extracurricular activities in which they participate, student age, or number of siblings in the family, or who constitutes the student's family. A survey would also allow researchers to provide a broader perspective of what students view as supports and constraints for their

school success and college aspirations. A longitudinal case study of individual students can explore perspectives and experiences during college. By following a student through his/her college years, researchers could make visible how first generation Hispanic high school students navigate college, and the kinds of supports students continue to pursue to ensure their college success.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore factors that might have contributed to first-generation high school students' decisions to go to college. Through the analysis of open-ended interviews I made visible how students decided they wanted to go to college and how this decision was kept alive through different ways families, school personnel, and members of the community offered support. In this section I include implications for students, families, school personnel and members of the community.

Implications for Students

The students in my study demonstrated that in order to get to college, they needed to be active agents in constructing their own future. Students must become strategic in making and pursuing their decisions to go to college. It is not enough for students to have a college-going thought. Students need to keep the thought alive by becoming proactive in getting there. Students who want to go to college should seek help and advice, enroll in college preparatory classes and participate in extracurricular activities to increase their opportunities of getting accepted.

The students in this study took action in shaping their own college pathways. They took the funds of knowledge from their families and pursued social networks in schools and communities. As students navigated through different networks and utilized resources that were available to them, they acquired social capital needed to continue on their college going pathway. As students I interviewed demonstrated, rather than focusing in what is not available to them, students should look at what is available to them in families, schools and community.

Students in this study stated that their families talked to them but did not indicate they had reciprocal conversations with their parents and other family members. It may be important for students to have conversations with their families about families' past experiences and the way the knowledge of those experiences and the openness of family members in sharing their past has shaped student decisions for their futures. Students can empower families by acknowledging the funds of knowledge they acquired from their parents and extended family members. The knowledge families provide is beneficial to students' college going decisions.

Implications for Families

Families play an important role in the students' college-going aspirations. Therefore, family members need to be proactive in shaping students' educational decisions. It is important for families to talk to students about their good or bad experiences and the consequences of the decision they had made in their own youth. These talks are valuable resources for students in students' college pathways. When students know the consequences of their families' experiences, they are given the opportunity to use this knowledge to

envision and construct their futures. Through these talks families can generate and distribute knowledge about education, adult life, consequences, constraints, and opportunities students may have based on the decisions they make. By talking and sharing their own experiences, families can inspire their children to do and "be better," as Angel pointed out.

Implications for School Personnel

School personnel, including teachers, counselors, administrators, coaches and directors of extracurricular activities, must be proactive by talking to students and listening to what they talk about. In order for school personnel to be considered a resource, they must make themselves available to help students in various ways. As students in this study demonstrated, help for college does not mean just providing college information. Students look for school personnel to obtain encouragement, advice, resources, skills and someone to listen to their problems. Teachers, counselors, administrators and other adults at the school should not forget that students need emotional resources and supports. Sometimes all it may take to influence a student's life is asking them about their interests or how they are doing.

It is important for school personnel to listen to students to find out what each student needs and to offer that support. When school personnel show interest in students' college aspirations, students gain confidence in themselves and move forward despite the constraints they face. While there may be multiple programs and activities designed to promote college, the programs in themselves do not inspire and encourage students. It is the human contact with teachers, counselors, coaches and band directors that provides the social capital students need.

This means that school personnel must go beyond their normal duties of teaching and engage students in conversations about students' potential and future opportunities. It is important to identify the potential in each student and to make the student aware of their potential. Teachers can inspire students to pursue a career by talking to them about college and different options students will have if they obtain a college education. Students can gain resilience in the midst of adversity with the help of the school personnel.

Students in my study demonstrated that they first formulated ideas about college before high school, as early as third grade for Maria. What students show is that it may be important for schools to start promoting college awareness activities early on. Students in elementary school can start envisioning college and can subsequently become strategic about their educational decisions. Additionally, schools can become proactive in students' college pathways by inviting community leaders and professionals to visit the schools. Invited speakers, college awareness days, teachers, counselors and others who interact with students have an impact on student ideas and actions toward a college future.

Implications for the Members of the Community

An important implication for members of the community is to acknowledge that they serve as resources. As students participate in different community networks, the community must make visible what is available to students. Community leaders (e.g., professionals and church leaders) should be proactive in sharing their experiences and careers and informing students of what is available to them. Students who decided to go to college found these conversations useful to continue to want to go to college. By engaging in conversations about their past experiences, decisions, and the consequences of those decisions, community

members like Antonio, can become instrumental in helping high school students envision a different future and possibilities for themselves.

Church leaders and professionals should also promote ethical behaviors through conversations with students and should become mentors and role models for students. A mentor and/or a role model has a big responsibility and a privilege of sharing and guiding students. This sharing and guiding must be sustained throughout students' schooling experiences. In their sharing life experiences, dilemmas, problems and successes with adults outside school or family, adolescent students can gain confidence and become inspired to move forward in their college going pathway.

The dropout, underachievement and college enrollment rates may be changed by families, schools, communities and students themselves taking an active role in paving a college pathway for Hispanic high school students. In order for students to move forward on their college aspirations they must create networks for themselves. Families, school personnel, and members of the community must make themselves available by talking to students and offering support throughout the students' schooling experiences.

For first-generation Hispanic high school students several factors were instrumental in their decisions to go to college. Deciding to go to college was a process sustained and kept alive through different supports. Despite the difficulties students faced throughout their lives they became resilient as they moved forward in their college pathways. Students did not focus on what they did not have. They were proactive in making college happen by taking up resources available through families, schools and the community. Students were active in constructing their possibilities and not becoming victims of their environments. What the

adolescents demonstrated is that the key to succeeding is that students must construct their own future by utilizing the knowledge and resources they acquire.

As a society we need to not focus on what is not working for students or that they are not being successful. Instead, we need to focus on how we can positively influence students. I need to ask myself daily: What do students need? How am I being active in supporting them? Are we too busy with our own agenda and forget others around us? It may take one action, one word, or a conversation with a student that may influence them to move forward in their educational pathway. As a parent, administrator, teacher and church leader, I must think about students' needs, must listen to them, and help in ways they need. Students might only need somebody with whom they can be honest, a friend they can count on, or just someone who will listen and talk to them. We will see optimal results in our educational system when all stakeholders realize what positive impact we can have in the lives of children and adolescents. If we just listened, we would know what support each student needs, how they need it and when they need it. We as society should not give up any child or adolescent; we just need to give the right things, in the right way at the right time and for the right reasons.

First Steps Forward: Using Insights from this Study to Create Possibilities for First Generation Hispanic High School Students

Interviewing the students has made visible a range of possibilities that can be implemented by schools, families, and communities in supporting students' college decisions and aspirations. Using the insights from this study, I have taken actions in my school and church to create opportunities for promoting college and supporting students in their college

decisions and pathways. After discovering that my interviewees had started thinking about college as early as third grade for Maria, I realized that as an assistant principal at an elementary school, I could take actions in promoting college for all students at my school. In my work I have the opportunities to talk to teachers and students across grade levels and to create initiatives for the whole school. Using insights from Andres and Angel, I decided to develop a University Day initiative during which students could develop awareness about college options and could start thinking about going to college. While we had a University Day at my campus previously, it was done once a year and involved an outsider from the local university coming to talk to students about college. Understanding the need for sustaining college-going aspirations over time, as demonstrated by the participants in my study, I have proposed to enhance the University Day activity and involve all students, their parents, and teachers in learning about and sharing information about different universities and about the opportunities students can have with a college degree.

The University Day initiative involves each classroom selecting one university of their choice, learning about that university, and promoting this university all year by decorating the halls, making banners, and wearing a purchased or self-made university shirt on the designated University Day. Students, with the help of their teachers, research about their chosen university and share the information with the whole school throughout the year during morning announcements. During the announcements students and their teachers talk about the location of the university, what it is best known for, as well as about different opportunities the university offers including academic majors and extracurricular activities.

Through the activities involved in the University Day initiative, students learn about a variety of universities in and out of state and have opportunities to start thinking and talking

about which university they might want to attend. By becoming school experts for a particular college or university, elementary students at my school begin to see that elementary school is part of the pathway toward a college. Hearing about different majors and extracurricular activities enables students to consider that there are colleges to accommodate different interests, be it art, math, music, science, sports, or a military career. The University Day initiative has enabled the students, faculty and staff to understand the concept of college and to envision future possibilities. Developing awareness of college opportunities also helps students realize that succeeding in school on a consistent basis is needed for entry to college at a later time.

As an assistant principal, I take every opportunity I have to talk to the students about what they have learned about college and what they may want to do in their futures. For example, when students are sent to my office for discipline issues, I start talking to students by asking them what they would like to be when they grow up. I encourage them to talk about their future plans and college ideas. When a student mentions a career, I then talk to them about which university their class was promoting and which university the student might want to attend. This allows the student to focus on their long term goals and helps them see that these goals can only be possible if they do well in school. If students are not able to talk about a future goal, I ask them to talk about some of their interests and then I talk to them about future possibilities they may have. Promoting University Day imitative across the school enables elementary students to learn about different universities, college degrees, careers, and reminds them to develop and stay focused on their college aspirations.

In addition to finding out that early college awareness was important for my high school student interviewees, I also learned from them about the importance of teachers in

promoting postsecondary education for students. Throughout the interviews students talked

about teachers providing them with information about college and supporting them by

listening, sharing information, talking, and finding ways to help with applications or

scholarships. Using this finding, I have started talking to teachers at my school about

promoting and sharing their college experiences with their students. In talking with teachers

in staff rooms and school hallways, I have seen that teachers have become actively involved

in promoting and talking about college. They have been very supportive of the University

Day Initiative and are actively involved in helping students select the class university,

prepare the information, create banners and t-shirts to promote the university throughout the

whole school. While I do not know the extent to which teachers share with students their own

college experiences, I have noticed that overtime teachers at my school have become more

engaged in building university awareness for the students.   By talking about college and

working with their students to develop expertise about a particular university, teachers have

become resources for students, older siblings, parents and other teachers at the school and

beyond.

The third finding from this study which I have used to promote and develop college

awareness opportunities for students in my school comes from my interviewees sharing the

importance of family members as supports for college pathways. The high school students I

interviewed had indicated that moving forward on their college pathway was possible when

family members talked to them about college and the consequences of not going to college.

Additionally, as Maria made visible, family member's actions in seeking and sharing college

information also became supports for student college aspirations.

I have shared these findings with other school administrators at my school and we have started talking to parents and student family members about college and the need for families to talk to students about college. We have tried to help parents understand that even if they themselves did not go to college, sharing their life choices, decisions, and the consequences of those decisions, and talking to students about college, can support students in wanting to attend college. Now we have parent volunteers who actively participate in the University Day initiative by teaming up with a particular classroom, creating banners, and wearing a university shirt to school. Through participating in University Day activities, hearing morning announcements, and seeing different universities promoted around campus, parents are exposed to university information and develop ways of talking with their children about college. Through this campus initiative, parents have become resources about college not only for our school and their own children but also for other family members.

In addition to being able to use the findings from my study on the elementary school campus where I work, I have also had opportunities to build on the interviewee student's insights about the importance of the community in offering support throughout their college pathways. At the church where I serve as a youth leader, I seek out and create formal and informal opportunities to talk to adolescents about the importance of graduating from high school and pursing a postsecondary degree. I have often shared my own childhood and college experiences because, like many of the adolescents in my community, I came from poverty and a difficult home environment. However, I share with them that despite the obstacles, I have managed to go to college, obtain a bachelors, a master's and now a doctoral degree, and become successful in my career as an educator. I also tell them that in interviewing other first generation Hispanic high school students I have seen how students can

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turn the constraints into opportunities and funds of knowledge for developing and sustaining college aspirations.

By sharing the study's findings and my own experiences, I have opened doors for adolescents in my church community to discuss their fears, struggles, obstacles, and goals. By talking to them, listening to their problems and their aspirations, and at times offering financial help, I provide the support I have learned that adolescents need in their college pathway. Being a role model and a resource for the students, I have been able to encourage the adolescents to do better in school, to envision college, and to develop resilience through their struggles. Since I work with youth of different ages, I have noticed that the older high school students and those already in college often start sharing their college ideas and pathways with their peers and younger children. By supporting adolescent college aspirations in my church community, I have enabled the youth to become resources and supports for others as well.

I have also started talking to the leaders at my and other churches about the importance for them to talk about their life decisions and experiences with adolescents who may be developing or pursuing college aspirations. I have shared with them my findings about ways Antonio, a church youth leader, was able to support Kike in staying "out of trouble" and continuing to want to go to college. In talking to church leaders around the town I have been able to show them that sometimes just talking about their experiences and decisions can become a resource which helps students decide to go to college. As the students in my study made visible, hearing other people's stories and advice can help the students to envision "better" futures for themselves and their children. Many times church leaders, community members, and families, are not aware of the impact they can make in promoting

and supporting student college aspirations. They often see themselves as not having sufficient information or experience about college rather than understanding that they can be and help students develop funds of knowledge for college by simply talking to the students and expressing interest in their college goals.

Any opportunity I have, I share my study's findings about the importance of families talking to students and listening to them. To build parent capacity, as a church leader, I have also worked on providing information parents seek. I have had several parents express that they do not feel comfortable going to the school to ask questions about college or about enrolling students in classes needed for college preparation. To address this parent discomfort, I sought ways to build parent knowledge and capacity for supporting their children. To this end, I have invited guest speakers (e.g., counselors, teachers, and university graduates) to our church to talk to parents and to answer questions parents and/or students have about school and college related issues. Families I work with have been able to network with schools and obtain resources they need in order to support their adolescents throughout their schooling experiences. By gaining knowledge about ways they can support adolescents and move them forward on their college pathway, parents and other family members have become more active in promoting college and supporting their children's college dreams.

I have been able to take these actions in my school and community because I have had an opportunity to learn from the high school students I interviewed. What my student participants shared with me about their experiences and supports for their college going decisions has enabled me to see and create possibilities for other students in my work and church settings. The actions I have taken based on the findings of my study are a few of the examples of possibilities that can be developed by other educators and community members.

The findings of my study have demonstrated that any person in a school, family, or the community can have an impact on first generation Hispanic high school students' school success, college aspirations, and the ways they envision themselves and their futures. By listening to the students, talking with them, and becoming proactive in supporting students in their decisions about their present and future possibilities, any person, be it a teacher, a coach, an uncle, a stay at home mom, a doctor, a church member, or a community leader, can contribute to student success. The more persons are involved in student education in supportive ways, the easier it may be to alleviate the dropout and underachievement challenges minority students face. Focusing on student, family, school, and community strengths and talking to students and those around them may be the beginnings of promoting success and reshaping educational opportunities for all students.

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Education

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2003	M. Ed	Curriculum and Instruction. The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, Brownsville, Texas
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Certifications

2007-present	Principal, Grades EC-12th
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Professional Experience

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1999-2007	English Teacher, Lopez High School, Brownsville, Texas
1996-1998	Instructional Aide, Lopez High School, Brownsville, Texas
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Scholarly Conference Presentations and Attendance

2009	Co-presenter. Academic Language for Hispanic University Students. Panel presentation at the National Association for Bilingual Education.
2009	Forming and Testing Hypothesis. Teaching, Learning, and Service Conference, The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College
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Professional Presentations and Workshops

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Professional Service

2005-2006	Campus and District Curriculum Writer, Brownsville Independent School District
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Professional Memberships

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