COMO EL CANTAR DEL COQUI:

EDUCATORS OF THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA IN THE U. S.

DESCRIBE WHAT RESILIENCE MEANS TO THEM

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by

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This qualitative study was conducted in the Midwestern U.S. It examined the resilience stories of Puerto Rican educators in an urban school district. The sample consisted of 12 adult participants who were asked to describe their experiences with resilience in different stages of their personal development. Participants articulated how their meaning of the construct impacted their interactions with students and their beliefs regarding the development of resilience. The findings from this study suggested that resilience is an interactive process involving key personal attributes of the individual and environmental factors within that individual’s home, community, school, and culture that results in the human ability to thrive in the face of adversity. Implications and recommendations for further research are discussed.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation first to God. To my husband Jim Balotta whose love and support cushioned my falls and leaps through the peaks and valleys of this long journey. Thank you for being my patient and amazing hero. I love you.

To my mother Dalia: You were a great storyteller, a lover of God and of reading, and a model of strength. To all the women in my family who came before me. Mami, Abuela Carmen, Titi Yuyù, and Titi Emma, in your stories of dreams unfulfilled I found the faith and will to chase and reach mine. To my sister-cousin Solvie just because you believed.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES........................................................................................................................................... xii

CHAPTER

I. .................................................................................................................................................................... 1

Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................................................... 2

Statement of the Problem: A Brief Journey into Being Puerto Rican......................................................... 9

Puerto Ricans in the U. S. ................................................................................................................................ 12

Significance of the Problem: Race and Puerto Ricans................................................................................. 15

Acculturation.................................................................................................................................................. 23

II. .................................................................................................................................................................... 30

Review of the Literature: An Introduction.................................................................................................... 30

Resilience: Purpose and Organization of the Literature Review................................................................. 32

The Waves of Resiliency: A Historical View of Resilience.......................................................................... 32

Resilience defined........................................................................................................................................... 38

Risk and protective factors............................................................................................................................ 41

Models of Resilience..................................................................................................................................... 46

Quantitative Approaches to Resilience Research......................................................................................... 48

Qualitative Approaches to Resilience Research........................................................................................... 55

Mixed Methods Studies of Resilience........................................................................................................... 60

Resilience Research with Puerto Ricans/Latinos......................................................................................... 63

Acculturation and Other Terminologies....................................................................................................... 66

Puerto Rican Families.................................................................................................................................. 74

Resilience and Education............................................................................................................................... 80
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resilience and Puerto Rican Educators.</th>
<th>83</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Phenomenological Research as Methodology</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology and Significance of the Study</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Bias</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paradigm</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection methods</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of documents and products</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Findings and Discussion of Environmental Factors</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Como el cantar del coqui: Beginnings</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes Under the Three Major “Suns”</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “Sun of Home”</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong mothers, absent fathers and domestic hurdles</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “Sun of Community and Culture”</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

viii
Community resources ........................................................................................................... 153
Machismo and Marianismo ............................................................................................... 158
Cultural pride and race .................................................................................................... 167
Language: ”I am my accent.” ......................................................................................... 172
The “Sun of School” ......................................................................................................... 187
Clouds of rejection and rays of acceptance ..................................................................... 188
Leadership ........................................................................................................................ 200
Value of education ............................................................................................................ 205
V.
Their “Essence:” Personal Attribute Themes ................................................................. 212
Intuition ............................................................................................................................. 214
Discernment and differentiation ...................................................................................... 215
Choices ............................................................................................................................... 218
Intelligence ........................................................................................................................ 223
Adapting and coping ......................................................................................................... 226
Self-reliance ........................................................................................................................ 232
Walking away .................................................................................................................... 233
Persistence ......................................................................................................................... 240
Congeniality ........................................................................................................................ 245
Love of Family .................................................................................................................. 246
Generosity to Others ......................................................................................................... 248
Generosity of Others ......................................................................................................... 252
Gratitude ............................................................................................................................. 256
List of Tables

Table 1. Risk Factors Comparison Table by Researchers ............................................. 44
Table 2. Environmental Factor Themes......................................................................... 114
Table 3. Comparison Table of Themes........................................................................... 213
Table 4. Key Personal Attributes ................................................................................... 214
Table 5. Teacher Themes................................................................................................. 301
CHAPTER I

I am from boomerang,

From Pan Am and Eastern Airlines,

I am from the shores bathed by the Caribbean Sea,

Tempestuous, gentle warm freedom,

I am from Hibiscus and the song of the minute Coquí

Whose piercing call ushers the dusk and welcomes the night.

I am from Sunday school and tears,

From Dalia and Jahveh.

I’m from the lonely and the faithful,

From be humble, but be proud.

I’m from the beginning Word who became man and rescued my soul.

I’m from The Island, blood of distant but converging soils,

From yucca and bacalao

From the wealth denied my grandmother,

the cost of loving one outside her social class and race

Moments frozen on paper and plastic,

Long echoing voices and memories of smiles,

Treasures kept in canisters no one cares to see.

I am from those journeys of laughter and sorrow:

So much left of them, so little of me.

—Adapted from “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon
Purpose of the Study

Muted voices can neither change the world nor inspire hope. From the onset of my teaching and school counseling careers twenty-nine years ago, my own experiences with resilience have led me to question for years how others, particularly educators in my cultural group, define resilience in light of their personal stories. The meaning of resilience that I have derived from my journey in overcoming the odds colors my interactions with my students. I decided at a very young age that I would use the lessons learned from my personal story to help guide others in their path to overcome odds similar to and different from mine.

Over many years I have continued to carry that voice within me that asks how and why I succeeded in spite of experiences that experts would deem as characteristic of an at risk child. Similar to the Puerto Rican myth of the coquí, few might have thought that I had it in me to come this far. Life events have driven my desire to know what resilience means to others who have overcome similar or even more serious challenges. My personal reflection on my experiences drives my passion for my work as a school counselor and the belief that all students can accomplish great things. Reflecting on my experiences has translated into a no excuses approach to working with my students, particularly when working with Latinos. I try to guide my students to focus on possibilities and aim to instill in them personal pride through the validation of their cultural heritage and the acceptance of others. Little or nothing compares to the feeling derived from seeing a student’s eyes light up as a result of an insight inspired by a shared anecdote that validates his or her own experience. Perhaps sharing a condensed version of my personal story at this juncture will convey to the reader why no other topic would do
as the focus of this study. Providing a picture of the odds that I encountered in my personal life compels me to tell this abbreviated version of my personal story.

I was born in Ponce, a southernmost coastal city in the Island of Puerto Rico, in 1962, to married parents who were socio-economically deprived and living with my paternal grandparents. Three and a half years later, my father entered into an amorous affair with another woman and divorced my mother, leaving her the single parent of two young children. The dissolution of their marriage resulted in my mother being alone with us and living in the rented wooden shack where we had dwelled as a family before my father’s departure. She cleaned, cooked, laundered clothes and sewed for other people in order to feed us and keep a roof over our heads. When this strategy proved to be nearly futile and we were close to eviction, my mother relocated us to Union City, New Jersey where her older brother lived with his wife and daughter.

My mother, an inherently independent woman, immediately took a job at a garment factory so that we could rent our own apartment and thus allow for the restoration of my uncle’s privacy with his family. She worked out of the house cutting embroidery during nights, and at the factory during the day. We received no child support during that time. Living in poverty was almost an adventure because my mother, an inventive woman of an alchemistic talent, possessed a creativity that made us feel like adventurers.

We adventurers had to share a bed with Mom to keep the night creatures away and to keep warm. We ate canned spinach to be strong like Popeye, and carrots to be witty like Bugs Bunny. Every so often, we caught a glimpse of the things we were missing. Those times were the inspiration for my wanting to obtain an education. I
dreamed of being a professional woman like the ones I saw on television and like my favorite teachers. Apart from those teachers, most of my career oriented role models were two dimensional because during my early years I personally did not know any other females who possessed a college degree.

My mother, while doing a good job at keeping us fed and safe, did not take good care of her own health. Not enough sleep and poor nutrition led her to collapse at work. As a result she was fired from her day job. Our pastor took us to the welfare office, where we were approved for food stamps and help with the rent. My mother felt ashamed that she had to resort to receiving government assistance. She was convinced that it was her job to provide for herself and her two children. Soon after that event, my mother began dating a man who was a few years her senior. They married. Immediate withdrawal from government assistance ensued. Later, the arrangement that had seemed like the perfect solution to our economic predicament and for our mutilated family structure proved to be worse than the original problem. My stepfather, a product of physical abuse and a seventh grade dropout with a drinking problem, turned out to be a far cry from the dad that we all had hoped he could be. His belligerent outbursts became more and more frequent.

My mother and stepfather conceived a boy whom he did not want my mother to carry to term. He was verbally abusive to both his son and to my first brother. Emotional distance from my brothers became a hallmark of their relationship. My situation was quite different, as he was very interested in me. I was seven years old when he began to persecute me, procuring sexual favors by pretending to want to prepare me for the future. It would be years before I would gather the courage to tell, because he threatened to abandon us. He said that my mother would be very sad and that it would be my fault. I
believed that my mother would die from a nervous breakdown if I told. The possibility of us having nowhere to go terrified me. Fear and silence accompanied me for years. Daydreams constructed from ideas found in hand-me-down story books discarded by our neighbor’s grandchildren encouraged me to believe in a better future. A favorite: *The Little Princess,* the story of Sara Crewe, a novel originally written by Frances Hodgson Burnett in 1888 that told of a little girl whose positive attitude and unrelenting hope helped her cope with poverty, abuse, and humiliation. A good neighbor’s unconditional positive regard served as a mediating factor for the protagonist until she could again bask in the unconditional love and safe embrace of her lost father.

School was a welcome break from my worries at home; but there my condition of being Puerto Rican provided the fuel for the prejudice of one of my teachers. I beg the reader’s indulgence as I describe a day in school during that time.

The autumn morning announced the impending arrival of winter. Bright sunrays engaged in a playful dance with leaves of colorful hues. Brown, green, yellow and orange tones effectively created the illusion of a gentle rain of gigantic gold, bronze, and copper flakes gracefully floating down from the heavens. I soaked in the sights, sounds and smells of the morning as I headed toward school and the inevitable and daily battle to preserve my dignity.

“Maria! You Puerto Rican pest! I hate you!” My teacher’s pursed lips and her piercing blue eyes seemed to fade me into oblivion every time I heard those words. Oblivion sometimes came in the form of a dark cloak room where the phantoms of fear and humiliation threatened to seize me like hungry beasts ready to consume my spirit. There I stood, a girl in the dark, neither a Puerto Rican girl nor an American girl—just a
little girl. I refused to allow the darkness to devour me. Filling my head with songs, stories and daydreams kept away the feelings of despair that hung over me.

I would have gladly stopped being a pest had I known what the word meant. Let’s see, “pest.” Was it the same as “psst,” as in trying to get a person’s attention? “Pest.” *Peste?* Could it mean *peste* like a Spanish word for stench? Why was the teacher calling me a pest? It was a while before I came up with a fitting definition of the word. I decided that a pest was anything that was excessively bothersome and could potentially pose a threat to your wellbeing. Roaches, mice, spiders, ants, mosquitoes and flies, those were pests, and they were brown, black or dark gray. It occurred to me that my teacher had called me a pest because of the color of my skin and that realization gave birth to the first time I remember feeling that for some reason my color and ethnic background were wrong. I decided that this was a battle that I had to win. I had to win my teacher’s love. I cannot say whether or not her feelings about me changed; but by the time I left her class, she was friendlier and seemed accepting of me.

Back home, our stepfather’s vociferous and profane screams could shake the very foundations of a child’s soul when the devil of alcoholic stupor came to possess him. He began facing devastating financial challenges. The added stress just made matters worse. That was the stepfather we came to know and fear, and the one we had to move away from six years later for the safety of my brothers and, unbeknownst to my mother, me.

We moved back to Puerto Rico where I completed grades seven through twelve, graduated from high school with honors and received a full scholarship to a prestigious university in Puerto Rico. Still, the money was not enough to cover other basic necessities. An alternative route led me to complete a degree in education at the
Interamerican University. Our family’s hardships did not cease, however. My youngest brother drowned at age seventeen in April of my college senior year.

Approaching the end of my eighth year of teaching in Puerto Rico, I relocated to Cleveland with the purpose of earning a better salary and living close to a university where I could attain my career goal of becoming a school counselor. Admission into Cleveland State University led to the completion of the degree of Master of Education in School Counseling.

The preceding paragraphs contain bits of my life that together with other significant events created conditions that some might expect would have led me to an adult life of despair. My brother from my mother’s first marriage did not fare as well. He turned to self medication with alcohol and other substances. He died at age thirty-four as a result. A strong reason for choosing the topic of resilience for this dissertation, this event prompted me to search for a deeper understanding of what makes some people overcome factors in their lives that could position them for failure. If only we could harness the force that propels some to overcome the odds in order to teach others how to pave their road to success over adversity. I strongly intend to derive lessons from this study that will further inform my practice as a school counselor and educator always in search of helping my students succeed in spite of their circumstances.

My personal story is riddled with events and experiences that could have had devastating results for me; but I managed to do more than just survive. Was it the strong faith-based lessons I learned during the years? Was it my bond with my mother? Could it have been my mother’s unrelenting expectations for my behavior? Did it have something to do with my intellectual ability and/or emotional intelligence? All these questions
remain to be answered. The question of whether or not the protective factors that I have identified in my personal journey carried the same weight for others will perhaps be answered in this study.

Stories told to me by others influenced my life as I vicariously lived through them and learned from them. The more I thought of the study I would do for my doctoral dissertation, the more those distant voices rang in my head. The stories must be told. I asked myself how I could access rich descriptions (Gibbs, 2007) of what it means to do more than just survive, to be resilient. And then I learned about qualitative research and the concept of phenomenology (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Moustakas, 1994).

My first experience with phenomenology occurred during a course on qualitative research which was a partial requirement for the doctoral degree in educational leadership at Ashland University in Ohio. I conducted a mini qualitative study: a psychological phenomenology that investigated what success meant to a group of high school students who were English Language Learners. A psychological phenomenology focuses on the meaning of the construct that the participants experiencing or having experienced the construct under study, assign to it (Creswell, 1998). That spring I presented my findings at an annual Multilingual Conference in Northeast Ohio and received positive feedback from the scholars and professionals who attended the session. Having conducted that study prepared me to tackle the task of designing and conducting a study for my doctoral dissertation that would not only fulfill the partial requirement for the degree I wanted to attain, but would also become an amplifying instrument for the voices of my study’s participants. Twelve Puerto Rican educators shared their stories of resilience and
Como el cantar del coquí conveyed what resilience meant to them and how their experiences with resilience colored their interactions with and expectations of their students. “Como el Cantar del Coqui” came to be.

**Statement of the Problem: A Brief Journey into being Puerto Rican**

A native Puerto Rican, I felt compelled to use the coquí as an icon that represents my study’s population of interest while honoring my autochthonous roots. Scientifically known as *Eleutherodactylus Coquí*, the coquí is a tiny, (approximately an inch long) frog. We learned from traditional folklore that the coquí could not survive outside of the island of Puerto Rico, even under similar environmental conditions. (Recently, this myth has been dispelled because scientists have found a large and ever growing population of coquí in Hawaii.) This frog, an icon of Puerto Rican culture, has a call that has reportedly registered at 90 to 100 decibels at an approximate distance of one and a half feet from the creature. Its call, a song that for ages has constituted an endearing sound to Puerto Rican natives, provokes the rejection of Hawaiians who view it as a pest that disturbs their sleep (Goldman, 2004). Goldman posed that the dichotomy emerging from the differing views that Hawaiians and Puerto Ricans hold of the coquí has turned this frog into a cultural image that represents a reenactment of the experiences of the Puerto Rican Diaspora in the United States. To the Hawaiian natives the sound of the coquí is a nuisance and to Puerto Ricans, a cherished emblem reminiscent of home.

The coquí, an otherwise seemingly insignificant amphibian, is making its presence known in a territory that is far away from its home. Similarly, Puerto Ricans have become a part of the fabric of the United States of America through their migration
to the mainland over the past two centuries and in the present. The Puerto Rican presence in this nation cannot be obscured by the immigration policies of the twenty-first century because they share a unique historical relationship with the United States (Cruz, Marshall, Bowling, & Villaveces, 2008).

The Jones Act of 1917 afforded all Puerto Ricans the right to American citizenship. This fact translates into issues that differ from those of other Latinos who come to this country because Puerto Ricans are able to travel at will from the Island to the Mainland without the need for visas of any type (Acosta-Belen, & Santiago, 2006; Duany, 2002; Trias-Monge, 1997). In spite of that right, which some consider a privilege, an arrested development of sorts seems to characterize the Island’s and its people’s development of a positive identity. Fitzpatrick (1987) considered the latter a direct consequence of Puerto Rico’s colonial history and of the Estado Libre Asociado [E.L.A.]: The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the political position in which it places the Island. I will discuss the political meaning of E.L.A. momentarily but first let us take a brief look at the historical background of Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States prior to it becoming a commonwealth of the U.S.

Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States of America as a result of the Spanish-American war ending in 1898. Some scholars have argued that a more appropriate name for this war is the Spanish-Cuban-American War. Their argument is based on the premise that Cuban freedom fighters had been steadily succeeding in their fight for independence during battles with Spanish military forces for three years before the United States became involved in the conflict (Acosta-Belen, & Santiago, 2006; Flores, 1993).
Puerto Rico’s colonial relationship with the United States remains as it has been for the greater part of more than a century. The island at the time of the U.S. occupation had been granted political autonomy by Spain only a year prior to the aforementioned war. Under the United States’ hegemony Puerto Rican leaders were forced to step away from their recently acquired political liberties and were stripped of the rights that they had arduously worked for and finally achieved under Spanish rule, namely, to develop an autonomous form of government (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006).

Migration to the United States from Puerto Rico started in the late nineteenth century. Political exiles sought opportunities to freely express their beliefs regarding the political and economic state of the island and to avoid retaliation from Spanish officials. The children, particularly males, of affluent families traveled to Europe and to the U.S., seeking higher education opportunities. It was, however, after the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico, that migrating to the United States was actively encouraged by U.S. officials. Migration served as an alternative for addressing the dire poverty and rampant unemployment that plagued the island. Most of all, this migratory wave served to address the need of the United States for cheap labor in the agricultural and the rapidly growing manufacturing arenas (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Grosfoguel, 2003; Whalen, 2001).

Together with the right to American citizenship, the Jones Act of 1917 imposed responsibilities such as mandatory military service, otherwise known as the draft, for Puerto Rican males. It brought forth the U.S. military occupation of island territories for the establishment of military bases due to Puerto Rico’s position as a strategic military point for the U.S. armed forces (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Duany 2002;
Grosfoguel, 2003). Puerto Ricans were not given the choice to decide between being a territory of the U.S. and becoming an independent sovereign nation. The U.S. Congress is the only body that has the power to grant this choice, and it has neglected to deal with the issue to date (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Trias-Monje, 1997).

In a nutshell, this is what the commonwealth means to Puerto Rico. Together with American citizenship and the draft, the Jones Act congressional decree also afforded Puerto Rico a higher degree of self government (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Grosfoguel, 2003; Trias-Monje, 1997). Nevertheless, Puerto Rico still lacks representation in the U. S. Congress. Puerto Rico also lacks a vote in presidential and congressional elections. Those who oppose the commonwealth consider the latter as further evidence of Puerto Ricans’ second class citizenship. Although federal taxes are not imposed on the Island’s residents, Puerto Rico’s economy is completely integrated with the U.S. economy due to U.S. corporate control over the economy of the Island (Duany, 2002; Grosfoguel, 2003). Neither a sovereign nation nor a state of the federal union, Puerto Rico functions as an incorporated territory of the U.S.A.

**Puerto Ricans in the U.S.**

Latinos or Hispanics are the largest growing group in the United States, but demographers vary in their projections of the year in which this population will become the largest minority represented by census numbers (Marotta & Garcia, 2003). Puerto Ricans are considered Latinos. The term *Latino* was incorporated into the U. S. census in 2000 and is used interchangeably with the term *Hispanic* in reference to people of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American descent. The term is inclusive of all
Spanish cultures regardless of race. Grosfoguel (2003) suggested that the term Latino emerged as an alternative to the term Hispanic in order to support certain educational, political, and social policies. He mentioned bilingual education and immigration rights as examples. Grosfoguel criticized the use of these generic terms because they ignore the differences that exist across all the nations that they represent. Marotta and Garcia (2003) noted that the debate about the adequacy of either term is an ongoing battle with no end in sight right now. Consequently, they suggested that rather than researchers joining this debate when writing about Latinos, they define their use of terms for their readers’ benefit and proceed with the work at hand. For the purposes of this study the terms Latino and Hispanic will be used interchangeably in accordance with the designations used in the United States 2000 Census. The term Puerto Rican will be used to designate people born in Puerto Rico or who are of Puerto Rican descent.

Researchers who have studied the Puerto Rican mainland and island populations based on the 2000 U.S. Census found that the number of Puerto Ricans in the United States mainland in 2000 was 3.4 million. The population number recorded living in the island of Puerto Rico for the same period, was 3.8 million. Population projections suggest that by the year 2010, the number of Puerto Ricans living in the United States will be greater than the number of those living on the Island (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006). The numbers based on the 2010 U.S. Census had not been released at the time this study was conducted.

By the year 2005, the Latino population in the U.S. had reached 41.3 million, making Latinos the largest and fastest growing minority group in U.S. society. The three largest groups within this category are Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans (Cruz et al.
Como el cantar del coquí

2008). Puerto Ricans make up over 9% of that 41.3 million. The traditional ethnic composition of many major cities in our country has changed to include greater numbers of Latinos and other peoples of Caribbean precedence. A study on Latinos in the U. S. and based on the 2000 Census revealed that there were cities with traditionally very few or no Latino residents where in the decade of the nineties the Latino population grew exponentially (Marotta & Garcia, 2003). Although these groups add new energy to U.S. society, they challenge the traditional melting pot Anglo-conformity assimilation model. Most noticeably, Latinos are more inclined than before to preserve their respective cultural and linguistic heritage and are quite comfortable functioning in two cultures and languages. This phenomenon has been identified in the literature as biculturalism (Padilla, 1995). Common in European countries, nevertheless, this phenomenon was not present in the U.S. until the latter part of the 20th century (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Duany, 2002). Today, Latinos resist the traditional American expectation for diverse people to become a part of the proverbial melting pot.

The tradition of the melting pot is an approach that carries the expectation that immigrants abandon their native cultural traditions to morph into a visual and auditory reproduction and manifestation of mainstream society’s accepted and expected values and characteristics. Puerto Ricans continue to occupy a place in American history that is shadowy at best. To make matters even more complex, racial issues add another dimension to the Puerto Rican struggle.
Significance of the Problem: Race and Puerto Ricans

Duany (2002) conducted a case study during which he researched two photographic collections from the early twentieth century. The Helen Hamilton Gardner and the Underwood and Underwood Collections are housed in the archives at the National Museums of American and Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution and at the Center for Historical Research at the University of Puerto Rico. He said that the photographs “depict Puerto Ricans primarily as blacks and mulattoes, thus placing them at the lower rungs of human evolution in the dominant thinking of their time” (p. 103).

The photographers may have approached these assignments without malice, however, they may have inadvertently created or reinforced the prevalent prejudices of the time against Puerto Ricans. Echoes of that thinking still resound today. I have often heard well-intentioned Caucasian or African-American people say about a fair skinned or Black Puerto Rican in a picture or a group, “They don’t look Puerto Rican.” They do not realize that there is no such thing as a standard Puerto Rican phenotype because Puerto Ricans come from “a long history of intermixing between indigenous populations, Spanish colonizers, and African-origin slaves” (Landale & Oropesa, 2002, p.233). This intermixing of races has yielded physical characteristics that span the color spectrum. The following story recounts true events experienced by a group of Puerto Rican people which relate directly to the discussion on race and Puerto Ricans.

Picture a southern state of the U.S. in the late 1960’s. Two military couples were out for a nice dinner and friendly conversation at a local diner not too far from the military base. Lisa and her husband, both Puerto Ricans with fair skin and blue and green eyes respectively, stood in stark contrast with their friends whose stereotypical Puerto
Rican features gave away their ethnic heritage. The host said to Lisa, “You and your husband are welcome to come in; but the ‘spics’ stay out. Read the sign. ‘No Blacks, No dogs, No Puerto Ricans.’ Lisa responded, “Then we leave too, because we are Puerto Ricans just like they are.” The host argued, “No you’re not. You’re White.” The couples left, their plans ruined for the night and the sting of racism burning their flesh and wounding their hearts. Considered by these people as less deserving of respect and service than dogs, they felt powerless in the presence of a force that carries the weight of an ageless racial prejudice of a nation that Lynn and Parker (2006) posed, “is obsessed with race” (p. 258).

I recall Lisa recounting this story with a mixture of sadness and yet a bit of pride perhaps having more to do with the fact that she stood up for her friends. Nevertheless, she also had a sense of relief because she and her husband could pass for someone of Western European descent in one of the most racially prejudiced and segregated territories of the United States of America at the time. Lisa was fortunate because she and her husband’s phenotypes matched the characteristics that were socially acceptable in that context. Because it was easy for them to pass as Caucasians, they experienced less racial prejudice than their friends. Lisa and her husband’s ability to speak English fluently was an added benefit. Their level of acculturation combined with their phenotype influenced mainstream society’s ethnic and racial perceptions of them.

Padilla and Perez (2003) argued that the acculturation process tends to be much more taxing for individuals who face stigma based on their skin color, language and ethnic differences. We will discuss acculturation in more depth following this section on race. In spite of the experience relayed in this story, both couples progressed into phases
of their lives where they found personal success. They were able to carry on without bitterness and hatred neither stumping their personal, social nor their vocational growth. Lisa and her husband resided in the U.S. for more than a decade after this event. They later relocated to Puerto Rico where she worked as a bilingual English teacher until her retirement in the nineties.

Duany (2002) and Acosta-Belen and Santiago (2006) highlighted how the American values on race have filtered into the Puerto Rican culture. Duany quoted Arkansas senator J. W. Fulbright in the 1950’s as declaring that Puerto Rico was, “an example of a racial solution” and George W. Culberson, director of Pittsburgh’s Commission on Human Relations reportedly said that, “there are no racial prejudices in the public life” of the Island (pp. 239-240). Puerto Rico, apparently considered a model of racial integration in the 1950’s by some, possessed different values regarding race.

In Puerto Rico, although skin color has always played a role in racial prejudice, social status has frequently superseded skin color as a base in discriminatory practices. Nowadays, Puerto Ricans have a better understanding of racism from a North American perspective because those who have traveled to or resided in the U.S. have communicated their experiences to relatives and friends in the island (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Duany, 2002; Landale & Oropesa, 2002). Helms and Talleyrand (1997) shed light on this phenomenon when they defined the concepts of sociorace and psychorace confirming what Betancourt and López (1993) had stated earlier about the possibility of the existence of a relationship between the concepts of cultural group and race or ethnicity with a psychological phenomenon. They defined sociorace as related to the cultural
characteristics of a group, and psychorace to the self-perception or appearance of an individual that has resulted from how he or she has been racially socialized.

López (2008) posited that it is likely that race acquired significance for Island natives as a result of its colonization by Spain, and that Puerto Ricans’ experiences with racism in the United States may have led to their adoption of U. S. racial views. Some researchers have found evidence that suggests that at least for self-identification purposes Puerto Ricans tend to choose racial descriptors that frequently stray from the paradigm familiar to U. S. mainstream society. For example, Landale and Oropesa (2002) conducted a study on the racial self-identification of Puerto Rican women. Their sample consisted of 1,256 women living in the United States and 669 women residing in Puerto Rico. Most of the women in their sample, regardless of their place of residence favored the term Puerto Rican as a racial self-identifier versus a racial descriptor such as Black, White, or any other shade listed in between. Landale and Oropesa (2002) found that the mainland women, who did not self-identify as Puerto Rican, seemed to reject the racial dichotomy of Black and White that is prevalent in the U.S. They demonstrated a much higher tendency to self-identify as Latina or Hispanic as compared to their counterparts residing in Puerto Rico.

The Island residents in the Landale and Oropesa (2002) study selected identifiers such as Black, White, or other Spanish descriptors such as Trigueña which refers to a skin color that is midway between white and brown. The researchers concluded that mainland Puerto Rican women’s rejection of color-based racial identifiers may be a reflection of their experiences in a society where Black and White have historically represented the opposite ends of a racial hierarchy. Landale and Oropesa (2002)
suggested that the individual’s social context may significantly influence a person’s choice of racial self-identifiers.

Helms (1993) discussed how the stages of Black racial identity impact the reference group orientation of African-Americans. Two of the four stages mentioned in her study of the research seem particularly fitting to this discussion. They are the Preencounter and the Encounter stages of Black racial identity. The Immersion/Emersion and the Commitment constitute the other two (see Helms, 1993 for more).

If we view the experience with the teacher that I described earlier through the lens of the racial identity theory Helms (1993) espoused, one might say my reaction to the teacher’s behavioral manifestations of her personal biases regarding my race found me at the Preencounter stage of racial identity development. Although I connected my teacher’s aggressive behavior towards me with my ethnicity, I lacked the cognitive maturity to make a cathartic connection that would qualify me as being in the Encounter stage. The latter might explain my naiveté in believing that I could get the teacher to “love” me, and the feeling that my color and ethnicity were wrong. This seems to explain the daydreams and magical thinking in which I engaged for years hoping at that time that one morning I would wake up, look in the mirror and see a blonde girl with long flowing locks and big blue eyes gazing back at me in the mirror. The Encounter stage would come much later for me.

Helms (1993) submitted that the Encounter stage carries within it what could be considered the burden of an awakening. This insight is triggered by an event in a Black person’s life that brings forth the dawning of the realization that in spite of his or her efforts to measure up to the predominant race’s social and behavioral standards, he or she
will never measure up. The individual realizes that the racial designation assigned to him or her by virtue of skin color constitutes a lifelong sentence of being perceived as inferior by the mainstream race. Ifedi (2008) reached similar conclusions in her study of African-born women in higher education. Although not all Puerto Ricans can be identified as such based on skin color, in our vernacular it is a hard to define mark known as “la mancha de plátano,”[the plantain stain]” the indelible stamp that brands us as a people. Helms explained that sometimes this realization does not immediately follow that event, but that there may be a considerable distance between the event and the moment of the epiphany that places the person at the threshold of the Encounter stage. Consider the following story.

In the decade of the eighties, I dated a young man who was in the United States Air Force and whom I had met during a meeting at a military base in Puerto Rico. From a southern state, he looked like the all American stereotypical man. Big blue eyes, fair skinned, a stature of little over six foot tall crowned with light brown hair laced with golden threads that seemed to sparkle when kissed by the sun. My copper skin, brown eyes, curly brown hair and height of five feet and one and one half inches, constituted a severe contrast.

One day while we rode in his car he asked me, “What are you?” “Puerto Rican,” I answered. “No, I mean, what are you?” He continued to ask and I to respond in the same manner. Frustrated, he dropped the subject after my last attempt to answer his question by explaining that I was a product of the mix of Spanish, Taino Indian, French, and African blood. It would not be until a couple of years hence, when I moved to the Midwest that I would understand the true meaning of my friend’s question. He wanted to know whether
I was Black or White. Perhaps he secretly hoped that he could explain my skin color to his parents without stirring up and challenging their deeply rooted beliefs on the value of a person from a racial or ethnic perspective. This insight I believe triggered my induction into the Encounter stage as discussed by Helms (1993).

Like most of the participants in Landale and Oropesa’s (2002) study, I racially self-identified as Puerto Rican. My social context had not forced me to claim a position in a racial hierarchy based on skin color. My friend’s social context however, seemed to have instilled in him a need to place others in one of the categories familiar to him. Landale and Oropesa proposed that a better explanation for the differences in the choices of racial-descriptors of mainland and Island residents in their sample might be that they are a manifestation of the discrepancy between the mainland and insular societies’ views on race. They submitted that in Puerto Rico, racial categories are more fluid than in the U.S. so that choosing a category other than white there, does not necessarily place an individual at the bottom of a racial hierarchy that may make her the object of social stigma. Although my friend and I were both communicating in English, we were speaking two languages of race that were distinct and irreconcilable. Our ability to comprehend each other’s perspective of race was stifled by the fact that we were foreigners to each other’s social context.

I share these stories not because of narcissism, but because I believe as others have stated (Creswell, 2003; Ellis, 2004; Patton, 2002), that stories serve as instruments in the construction of meaning and the development of understanding of others’ experiences. I could have said that the characters in my stories felt the sting of racism, but the reader would have not, in my estimation, been able to gain a realistic sense of what it
was like to be in our shoes at that particular place and time. With this caveat I close this section on race and Puerto Ricans with the story of Rosa.

Rosa, a Puerto Rican teacher residing in a Midwestern city of the U.S., expressed the following during a conversation about discrimination and the colonial status of the Island. She said, “We didn’t land on Plymouth Rock. Plymouth Rock landed on us. We never had a choice. American citizenship was not a gift. It was an imposition.”

Statements like Rosa’s may seem offensive to those who have not experienced the intensity of the struggles that those who were young adults before and during the peak of the Civil Rights Movement in America had to endure. History tells us that Puerto Ricans participated in a referendum in 1917 to accept or reject American citizenship. Trias-Monge’s (1997) historical research revealed that out of a population that at the time exceeded a million, only 288 Puerto Rican citizens voted against becoming American citizens, a right conferred by the Jones Act. Whether or not there were extraneous forces that may have caused undue pressure for Puerto Ricans to overwhelmingly approve the conferment of American citizenship does not change the fact that they did. Additionally, one could question how much weight the vote of the Puerto Rican constituency would have really had had they overwhelmingly declined the offer of American citizenship.

Perhaps Rosa, at a time prior to our conversation had engaged in a search for the answers to these interrogatives. Nevertheless, what is relevant to this study is that she

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1 Although the phrase was first coined by Malcolm X (see www.cmgww.com/historic/malcolm/about/quotes_by.htm), she felt ownership of it by virtue of having suffered from mainstream racist practices and hearing the constant prejudicial comments of mainstream Americans aimed to remind her that she was not a descendent of the original settlers and builders of this great nation. She understood those comments as implied statements about how she as a Black Puerto Rican woman should be satisfied with being regarded as no more than a second class citizen of the United States of America.
and other people like her have succeeded in mainstream America in spite of language
barriers, parental illiteracy, poverty, racial prejudice, and many other characteristics that
would have qualified them as at risk (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Padilla & Perez, 2003;
Werner & Smith, 2001). They have demonstrated resilience in spite of the adversities
they have faced; but what exactly does this mean to them?

Because Puerto Ricans can travel freely between the island and the mainland, we
are not forced to abandon our connection to the land of our ancestors. Others must almost
sever their patriotic ties with their birthplace in order to legitimately become American
citizens. This seems to be the case for many of those who come to the United States from
other Latin American countries as in the case of our Cuban brothers and sisters. We must
avoid grouping all Latinos together as each Latino group has unique characteristics that
differentiate them from other Latinos (Cruz et al., 2008). Even though similarities exist
among groups, there are cultural and historical factors that impact the adaptation and
assimilation process of different groups of Latinos that we otherwise have come to know
as acculturation.

**Acculturation**

Catherine Collier (personal communication, December 3, 2006) while leading a
training on acculturation levels and rates assessment, argued that there may be reasons for
discrepancies between the academic performance of some immigrant groups versus
others. She said that for voluntary immigrants such as the Chinese, language acquisition
and academic achievement become primary goals. In contrast, she stated that for African
Americans who initially entered this country involuntarily, other issues such as racial
equality and preserving their individuality take the forefront in their concerns. One can wonder if the latter applies to Puerto Ricans who may seem resistant to adopting mainstream values and behaviors. Collier also posed that sometimes people experience a plateau in their acculturation journeys. That “culture shock” she said, seems to stagnate, if for a while, the individual’s ability to meet mainstream societal and academic expectations that may otherwise qualify him or her as resilient in the eyes of the beholder.

In my personal and professional experience, the level of acculturation of an individual seems to directly influence his or her performance in personal/social as well as academic situations. During more than two decades of working with Latino students, I have found that for those who face innumerable barriers and struggles in order to exit their countries and enter the U.S., and for whom many a time returning home could be a life threatening feat, academically succeeding in mainstream America is a matter of survival. I have also found that for low achieving Puerto Rican students, succeeding in American mainstream education is not necessarily a principal goal. Going back home to a place where their vernacular language and culture are embraced, is almost always an option.

Although acculturation is not the construct of focus of this study, it is relevant to the sample and population of interest. Acculturation theory emerged in the early 20th century out of the field of sociology. The melting pot theory surfaced from the early scholarly work on this phenomenon (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (2009) defines acculturation as the “cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture; also: a merging of cultures as a result of prolonged contact”
Como el cantar del coquí

Webster’s definition closely matches the anthropological and social fields’ definitions of the construct. One major difference is that the anthropological and social perspectives view acculturation as a process in which the change that is produced in either or both distinctive cultural groups largely depends on the power relationship between the two. This can occur at the group and or individual levels (Padilla, 1995).

Padilla (1995) researched the phenomenon of acculturation extensively and with a heavy emphasis on studying the construct with Mexican immigrants in light of psychological acculturation theory. He stated that most human and social service programs are predicated on the cultural assimilation belief that without total assimilation to the mainstream culture the attainment of success is impossible. As mentioned earlier in this chapter this is what we have come to know as the Melting Pot Theory. Padilla found that particularly in the case of Mexican families, the expectation of total assimilation constitutes a betrayal of their internal familial values and thus their cultural heritage. It seems plausible that the latter in some measure explains the resistance of some Puerto Rican students to the expectations of our educational system in the U. S.

Clachar (1997) conducted a quantitative study with 347 randomly selected Puerto Rican university students to investigate the resistance to the English language in Puerto Rico. School policy in Puerto Rico mandates the instruction of English as a second language starting in the elementary grades and through high school. Clachar’s study participants had been exposed to at least nine years of formal English instruction at the time of her study. The researcher conducted a factor analysis of her participants’ responses to a questionnaire regarding attitudes toward the use of the English language.
She found that although her participants demonstrated awareness of the usefulness and importance of English, they showed little motivation to learn it. She concluded that Puerto Ricans exhibit tendencies of intergroup distinctiveness which have thwarted the bilingualization of the Island’s natives. This suggests that the aforementioned resistance may be a sort of self-preservation mechanism that allows them to assert and protect their group’s identity in the presence of the mainstream culture (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Clachar (1997) submitted and Souto-Manning (2006) would agree that the acquisition of the English language in Puerto Rico has historically been seen as a symbol of the American power and dominance over Puerto Rico. The U.S. occupation of the island set forth the expectation that English would take the place of Spanish as the vernacular of its natives. This represented an insult to Puerto Ricans and a threat to their national and cultural identities. The acquisition of the English language was to be the universal remedy for Puerto Rico’s socio-economic ills. Students who acquired an acceptable level of proficiency in English could study in U. S. universities to later return to Puerto Rico and contribute to the socio-economic improvement of the Island. Clachar discussed how the acquisition of the English language has acted as an instrument for widening the gap between the Island’s haves and the have-nots. Upper and middle class children are able to attend English immersion private schools where they develop the level of English language proficiency that gives them access to a wider range of post-secondary opportunities and resources. This, Clachar (1997) said, has served to perpetuate the elite social position of the upper and middle classes.
The issue of resistance to the English language constitutes an educational challenge for schools receiving students of Puerto Rican descent who are Second Language Learners (SLL), particularly those who are brand new to the U.S. This may be especially true if their resistance translates in the minds of teachers and school leaders into a personal affront to the mainstream culture. Souto-Manning (2006) reflected on her practice and on research regarding the current educational expectations of teachers and SLL students. She concluded that what is viewed from an assimilationist perspective as resistance from students exhibiting overt opposition to the learning and behavioral expectations of our educational system, is merely a defense response. She asserted that it is their reaction to a system of indoctrination that devalues their cultural identity, strips them of historical pride and perpetuates a racist viewpoint that characterizes them as inferior.

Although Chomsky (2000) was not addressing the problems that SLL students in particular encounter in the American educational system, some of his insights on education seem relevant to this discussion. Chomsky painted a philosophical picture of the U.S. educational system that portrays it as an indoctrination machine that rewards its representatives, mainly teachers, administrators and other school authority figures, for training students to obey and never second guess their nation’s social and political practices. He posed that in this fashion, we rob students of the opportunity to think critically about social and political issues. Chomsky claimed that in doing this the educational system serves to protect those in control and perpetuate the status quo. His outlook on American public education depicts the educational system as nothing more than a business venture surreptitiously run by corporate interests that offers as its product
domesticated individuals devoid of the ability to critically evaluate what we do and who we are as a nation.

No matter how bleak the case of our educational system may seem, there are teachers who in spite of the limitations imposed on their practices, seek to develop in their students a sense of self-worth and the belief that they are valued contributors of knowledge within the classroom environment (Souto-Manning, 2006). This is in great measure what Freire (1993, 1998) and hooks (1994) wrote about in their reflections regarding the transformative and liberating power of education. Both Freire and hooks emphasized that a conscious-driven praxis is the cornerstone of an education of freedom. An approach of this sort to education requires that teachers think critically not only about their everyday practice and their beliefs, but also about the institution that they represent. They exhorted teachers to recognize that the learning relationship is much more than just a unidirectional transfer of knowledge. It happens in and outside of the classroom and by means of more than books, pencils and paper. It can occur in a quick moment and can emerge from even a simple gesture (Freire, 1998). Chomsky’s (2000) comments on Freire’s philosophy of education suggest that as dire as the educational situation may seem today, even he sees some hope for us. That is, if we are willing to engage in true democratic educational practices. Only then, as he pointed out, can we provide a safe venue for students to develop the ability to create new possibilities in their minds unbound by traditional conventions that in the future may equip them to change the world for the better.

Freire (1998), as did Nieto (2006), highlighted the importance of teachers respecting and valuing their students’ cultural identities if they are to engage in a
balanced learning relationship that edifies rather than macerates our students’ potential for intellectual growth. What these scholars have expressed seems to bear a special relevance to the teaching of SLL students. Puerto Rican educators who are in direct contact with Latino students and who have overcome personal, language, cultural, socioeconomic and other types of barriers to success can impact how SLLs, particularly Puerto Rican students, perceive their role in shaping their own future. These educators may have an advantage over others in inspiring Puerto Rican students due to shared cultural knowledge, beliefs and or experiences (Delgado, 1997). It is possible that the meaning that educators who have overcome adversity have derived from their experiences, translates into personal theories of resilience that inform their practice. For example, my personal beliefs and familiarity with the construct of resilience acts as a filter for my design of interventions in my work with my clients. The curiosity fed by those experiences led me to the topic for this study. The meaning that we have constructed from personal experience shapes our behavior. As our world continues to shrink through the global sharing of resources and ideas, the diversity in urban and non-urban schools continues to grow (Nieto, 2006). Sharing these stories may have the catalytic potential for helping others find their own path to resilience. Perhaps they will influence the direction of conversations long overdue.

This study asks three main questions. First, what does resilience mean to Puerto Rican educators who have overcome adversity? Second, what beliefs or theories of resilience have they constructed out of their experiences? And third, how do those beliefs and theories manifest in their approaches to helping students develop skills to prevail over adversity?
CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature: An Introduction

An old building majestically stood on the corner of the main street in an old town. Its stone walls resembled robust giants concealing stories of times gone by and echoes of voices no longer heard. The marked contrast between the southern and northern walls provided a metaphor for joy and sorrow. The southern wall anchored by colorful blooms of varied shapes and colors, was enhanced by specks of gold and silver emanating from the stone as it reflected the sun’s rays. The northern wall, a dark, deserted plane stood clothed in vines of ivy haphazardly draped over its lackluster surface. On this one a single streak peaked out through the ivy, standing out among graffiti that defaced it. Patches of dirt completed the look. The streak, a nondescript and undecipherable mark stood out as a flaw in the eyes of the common folk.

People concerned that visitors passing by the northern side of the building might get a wrong impression of their beloved town, demanded a solution. Attempts to obliterate it immediately followed. Sandblasting took care of the graffiti, but left the unsightly mark. Harsh chemicals bleached parts of the stones and the streak still remained. Painting the wall to even out the finish made the streak more prominent and the wall even less attractive. When all the attempts to improve the look of the wall had failed, the mayor commissioned an artist to paint a mural that might mask the ugliness of the site. The artist carefully studied the stone canvas and noticed a streak that inspired her to think of light and the force of nature. She thought about how the southern wall was
courted daily by the sun and the illuminating effect of this courtship. She could use the mark as a streak of lightning showing that even in the darkness light can reign.

The artist painted a scene of a lush garden filled with blooms that rivaled the beauty of the natural flowers on the opposite side of the building. Above the garden, a floating terrace held a group of magnificent figures reminiscent of Greek gods and goddesses with one of them extending a hand over the terrace banister. From the hand a streak of light radiated, so bright that it illuminated the earth below. The streak on the wall emerged from the artist’s work as a powerful source of light straight from the hand of a deity. New spotlights directed toward the wall and installed to draw the eyes of passersby, revealed specks of gold and silver that seemed to emanate from the golden streak of light that connected heaven and earth in the painting—a perfect representation of the universal strength that can allow us to find light even in the darkest and dreariest of places.

One could ponder whether the natural properties of the stone were responsible for the streak’s capacity to resist attempts to suppress it and to become a thing of beauty. One could wonder if the artist’s capacity to see the potential for beauty acted as a catalyst by creating the supporting details that pictorially served to highlight the streak’s esthetic value. If for a moment we could personify the streak, what could we say about the experience of its journey from being at risk of obliteration to becoming a thing of beauty? The participants in this study traveled a similar path, experiencing a transformation that took them from risk to resilience. The stories of twelve Puerto Rican educators illustrate what resilience means to them. Their personal narratives served as a rich source of data for the present study.
Resilience: Purpose and Organization of the Literature Review

The main purpose of this phenomenological study is to uncover how self-identified resilients describe their personal journeys and the meaning of resilience that they have derived from them. A greater understanding of the study participants’ experiential self reports warrants a trip through the extant knowledge on the construct of resilience as it relates to the focus of this study. This literature review serves as our vehicle for this purpose. This literature review is organized thus.

This literature review begins with a historical view of the construct of resilience. The three waves of resilience research as described by Richardson (2002) serve as the framework for the discussion on seminal work conducted by pioneers in the field. Next, we will enter a discussion of how resilience has been studied from a quantitative perspective. Subsequently, we visit the other side of the coin; that is, how qualitative researchers have approached inquiry on the construct.

Following the section on the history of the resilience construct, the reader will encounter a discussion of resilience research with Puerto Ricans/Latinos from both the quantitative and qualitative research traditions. A discussion regarding educators in the resilience literature will ensue, leading to a section on research with Puerto Rican/Latino educators. A section on qualitative phenomenological research as a methodology will close the chapter and usher the reader into the methods chapter of this dissertation.

The Waves of Resiliency: A Historical View of Resilience

Resilience research emerged from the phenomenological descriptions of the attributes of children who developed competence despite being exposed to factors
expected to stifle their normative development (Lundman, Strandberg, Eiseman, Gustafson, & Brulin, 2007; Richardson, 2002).

Richardson (2002) summarized resiliency inquiry as three distinctive waves out of which the concept of resilience materialized. He posed that resilience inquiry came out of the qualitative methodology known as phenomenology. This naturalistic approach led to the description of characteristics found to be common among children of mentally ill parents who had failed to develop normatively (Masten, 2001). The use of a phenomenological approach to investigating resiliency also led to the identification of attributes commonly found in survivors of at risk environments. The early work on resiliency inquiry led to the descriptors later identified in the literature as protective factors. This constituted the first of three waves in resiliency inquiry as described by Richardson (2002).

As early as 1950, Zander suggested that researchers studying mental hygiene in groups or individuals focus their attention on where the deep sense of dissatisfaction, chronic insecurities, and mental disarray originated, for individuals unable to cope with daily life stressors. He further recommended that researchers study the adjustment patterns exhibited or adopted by individuals experiencing mental health issues. Research on resiliency in the era of the fifties was mostly descriptive, serving to identify existing dilemmas (Richardson, 2002). The problem with this approach was that it seemed to paint a picture of hopelessness and helplessness for people unfortunate enough to be born amidst risk factors such as the ones later described in Werner and Smith’s (1992, 2001) study. It is of particular interest that even in the early era of resilience research, Zander (1950) encouraged others in the field of resilience to transcend from the description of the
state of study participants to the understanding of how that state came to be. It was only a few years after Zander’s recommendations that Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith embarked on a journey that would immortalize them in the field of human resilience. Their Kauai research study is recognized by resilience scholars as the seminal work in resilience inquiry (Bernard, B., 2004; Masten, 2001; Richardson, 2002; Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

Werner and Smith (1992) conducted a longitudinal study with a cohort of 698 children born in Kauai, Hawaii that set them apart from the deficits approach that had been so prevalent among behavioral scientists studying life outcomes for individuals during the decade of the fifties. They later coined the term resilience based on their seminal study (Bernard, B.), that spanned their participants’ lives from infancy into midlife starting in the year 1955.

Werner and Smith (1992) retrospectively identified the factors that led to psychopathology in individuals. Among the identified risk factors were perinatal stress, chronic poverty, parents’ educational level below high school, chaotic familial environments, and parental alcohol dependency or mental illness. (Additional risk factors and a list of protective factors identified by these and other authors will be presented in the section on risk and protective factors of this literature review.) Werner and Smith employed the use of rating scales, surveys, and other data collection methods to monitor the development of their participants from infancy into adulthood. They conducted correlational analyses to examine the relationship between variables identified as risk factors, protective factors, and disruptive life events with resilience as the independent variable. Although they identified a large group of study participants as being at risk for poor life outcomes, they found that about one third of them not only successfully
navigated the stage of adolescence, but further developed into successful adults (Masten, 2001; Werner & Smith, 1992, 2001).

During this period resilience was described as an individual’s ability to bounce back from exposure to circumstances or environments with the potential to cause the person to experience mental illness or psychological maladaptation (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000; Rutter 2000). Rather than stressing the negative impact of risk factors, Werner and Smith sought to identify the conditions or factors that led some of their participants to succeed despite their unfortunate beginnings, and even despite difficulties during adolescence such as teenage pregnancy and or poor school achievement (Werner & Smith, 2001). The focus of the earlier approach to resiliency inquiry was on fatalities; Werner and Smith’s focus was on survivorship.

The second wave of resiliency inquiry as described by Richardson (2002), focused on understanding the process involved in the attainment of protective characteristics that set people apart as survivors rather than victims of adverse life circumstances and or setbacks. Richardson said that as a result of this wave of inquiry the definition of resiliency changed to a view of the construct as the process involved in the attainment, development, and nurturing of the protective qualities identified in the first wave of research on resiliency. The use of such terms as invincibility, invulnerability, and stress resistance began to emerge in the literature as pioneers in the field were drawn to uncover what propels some individuals, particularly children, to overcome adversity (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Masten, 2001).

The concept of resilient reintegration discussed by Richardson refers to an individual being able to emerge from a disruptive event to reach a level of functioning
that is higher than what it was before the disruption occurred. He proposed that people can experience two other levels of reintegration from a disruptive life event that are essentially akin to surviving. One can return to a state of psycho-spiritual homeostasis, (This signifies getting back to where one was psychologically and spiritually before the disruptive event.), or one can reintegrate with loss. Reintegration with loss implies that the individual bounces back from the adverse experience but with some psychological or spiritual trauma. Plainly stated, resilience here is viewed as a linear model with the individual encountering disruptive life events along the way and reintegrating from them at different levels.

In the third wave of resilience theory, Richardson posed that resilience is observed from a more holistic perspective that transcends the psychological, intellectual and emotional facets of a person to include the theological and spiritual realms of life. It refers to a compelling energy that resides within us which propels us towards elevated goals such as achieving a sense of oneness with our higher power, whatever that may be. For example Kallampally, Oakes, Lyons, Greer, and Gillespie (2008) investigated the predictive quality of psychological resilience, acculturation, and spirituality on marital satisfaction. The inclusion of the variables of acculturation and spirituality in this study tell us that the focus here takes on two additional human dimensions that resilience research might not have considered measuring.

Brendtro and Larson (2004) combined the Circle of Courage model and key findings from resilience research to provide practical research-based ideas to promote youth development. The Circle of Courage principles are attachment, achievement, autonomy, and altruism. This model seems characteristic of the third wave of resilience
research as described by Richardson (2002) as altruism in this model relates to values, morality, and faith, among other attributes.

Names like Werner, Smith, Garmezy, Rutter and Masten seem to be the ones most frequently cited in the resilience literature. These scholars have dedicated a lifetime to studying resilience. For example, Norman Garmezy dedicated the greater part of his career to conducting research with children proceeding from psychologically and socially disadvantaged environments (Masten, 2001; Rolf, Masten, Cicchetti, Nuechterlein, & Weintraub, 1993).

British psychologist Michael Rutter is another scholar who is widely cited in the resilience literature. Many of the above mentioned researchers, working with colleagues and students, brought attention to the need for investigating resilience in children of mentally ill parents in order to inform clinical interventions in their work with children. The work of Garmezy, Werner, and Smith, along with Rutter, among others, shook the scientific world. Their research-based discoveries carried new implications for working with children which transcended the clinical domain and spilled into other fields of work with children (Masten, 2001; Rolf, Masten, Cicchetti, Nuechterlein, & Weintraub, 1993).

B. Bernard (2004) asserted that the last couple of decades of the twentieth century met with a proliferation of research on the construct of resilience. For example, M. Bernard (2004) studied emotional resilience in children through the lens of Rational Emotive Theory. His step-by-step group counseling design for teaching children emotional regulation strategies holds value for both the field of clinical psychology and for the personal-social domain in the area of school counseling. A resilience research pathway model generated the conceptual framework for the Head Start Program as we
know it (Masten, 2001). Education and psychology are only two of the fields impacted by resilience research discoveries. Another is the field of medicine, with its many disciplines (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007).

**Resilience Defined**

Resilience definitions abound in the literature. For example, Werner (1984) defined resiliency as “the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or sustained life stress” (p. 68). The meaning of resiliency in this case seems to be the ability to adjust or cope. Clinton (2008) made a distinction between resilience and resiliency. She described resiliency as the ability to bounce back to the level of functioning of the individual before the stressful event and resilience as a process that implies a transformation that results in the alteration of an individual’s life. This alteration causes the person not just to bounce back, but to exceed the prior level of functioning. Clinton said, “Resilient people are those who thrive in the face of trouble” (p. 214).

Earlier, we discussed Masten’s (2001) definition of resilience as, more or less, the ability to thrive despite harmful or risky circumstances or experiences, with an emphasis on the presence of conflict as a prerequisite for resilience. Others (Luthar et al., 2000; Rutter 2000) have defined it as a comparatively superior outcome despite experiencing situations deemed to represent significant danger for developing psychopathology.

Hjendal, Friborg, Stiles, Rosenvinge, and Martinussen (2006) proposed a definition that they thought was more adequate. They noted that longitudinal studies on resilience have focused on the factors that promote resilience, but have left out of focus the contributing processes involved in reaching positive results. They argued that
“resilience may alternatively be defined as the protective factors, processes and mechanisms that contribute to a good outcome despite experiences with stressors shown to carry significant risks for developing psychopathology” (p.195). Rutter in 2006 declared that resilience is “an interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite these experiences” (p. 2). Ungar (2004a) made a case for the inclusion of the cultural dimension into the definition of the construct.

The current status regarding the definition of resilience finds scholars seeming to agree on several elements. One of the most important ones is that resilience is not a trait, but an interactive process (Clinton, 2008; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2007). Resilience is contextually and culturally specific. Resilience can be learned as there can be a late onset of resilience (Clinton, 2008; Masten, 2009). There is agreement that there are risk factors and protective or promotive factors that interact in different ways to promote or hinder the development of resilience (Rutter, 2006). Scholars agree that resilience does not imply invulnerability because they have found resilient people who have been wounded (Clinton, 2008; Hunter, 2001). They have found that resilience is an ordinary trait that comes from the person’s ability to access support or helping resources within themselves and their environment (Masten, 2009). Hendershott (2009) might agree, as he posed that teachers have the power to help students overcome barriers to success. According to Hendershott, teachers can help wounded students learn to access resources within themselves and their environments which may equip them to beat the odds. He seems to suggest that being wounded does not preclude a person’s ability to resile.
Some have argued that there must be the presence of significant risk and with an outcome that is at least a normative level for deeming a person resilient (Masten, 2001; Rutter 2006). Both Masten (2001) and Ungar (2004a) have raised questions regarding who gets to say what normal or normative is. Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Othman, Kwong, Armstrong and Gilgun (2007) stated that because resilience research has mainly focused on a western social perspective of what normative behavior is, it has yielded a limited set of indicators of resilience that leaves out others that may be culture specific. Ungar (2004a) viewed resilience from a constructionist perspective, submitting that it is a construct that results from the individual’s contextual reality which is largely impacted by culture. The question of who determines what normal psychosocial adjustment looks like remains to be answered, but Masten (2001) averred that from a psychopathology perspective, normative refers to low or absent symptomatology of mental illness.

Based on the definitions found in the literature examined for this study, I propose that resilience can be understood as an ordinary, dynamic, and variable process that results from the multiple and multidirectional interactions among risk and protective factors in the individual’s internal and external, contextual and cultural environments, which leads to extraordinary outcomes despite exposure to extreme levels of adversity expected to cause deleterious effects on the psychosocial adjustment of a human being. In this case, extraordinary means that the person fares significantly better than others exposed to the same conditions (Rutter, 2006). It is important to note that the definition proposed here is merely a summary of what the experts in the field have posed. We must keep in mind, however, that what this study sought to know was what resilience meant to Puerto Rican educators who had overcome adversity.
Risk and Protective Factors

Risk factors and protective factors can be elusive concepts because what is a protective factor to one, may pose a risk to another (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007). Earvolino-Ramirez defined protective factors as the specific attributes or situations required for resilience to take place. Risk factors represent the elements that pose a danger to the individual’s psychosocial development.

Garmezy (1993), and Werner and Smith (1992) reported that resilience in the presence of excessive stress is attributed to three factors: (a) personal characteristics (coping strategy, intelligence, physiological reactivity, temperament); (b) nuclear family characteristics (cohesiveness and structure, parents); and (c) extra-familial characteristics (community organization, mentoring, supportive school environment). However, a follow up on the Isle of Wight study suggested that intelligence is not significantly associated with resilience (Collishaw et al., 2007).

Masten (2009), an authority in the field of resilience research, listed factors that research has shown are promotive of resilience. Among those are positive relationships with parental figures and other caring adults; intellectual skills (in the sense that the brain is not impaired); impulse control; sense of self-efficacy; feelings of worth, faith, and hope; supportive and prosocial partners and or peers; positive attachments with schools that are effective and organizations driven toward building positive social support; communities that offer affirmative networks and social capital building for families and children; and affirming positive cultural values, principles, customs, associations and assistance.
Earvolino-Ramirez (2007) listed the protective factors cited by recognized experts in the field of resilience. These experts were Anthony, Bernard, Garmezy, Masten, Rutter, and Werner. Her list contained 29 protective factors. Five factors were common in findings among the work of all six researchers listed. They were positive relationship, sense of personal worth, sense of self-efficacy, sense of humor, and high expectations. These are the traits or situations that researchers in the field have found to be common among children and adolescents who have overcome adversity that differ from those experienced by others who have not resiled, let alone exceeded, life-outcome expectations. Werner and Smith (2001) suggested that because resilience research has mostly focused on these populations, research is warranted with adults.

Wolin and Wolin (1993) devised a model to help survivors of risk develop resilience based on the knowledge gained from their research. These researchers viewed resilience from an ecological perspective as have others (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1999; & Werner & Smith, 2001) in this field of study. Wolin and Wolin used the archetype of the mandala to help adults understand that resilience can be learned. Their purpose was to reach beyond academia into the secular realm of the lay person who may never have access to academic journals. The mandala depicted the self and what they named the *Seven Resiliencies*. They were the following:

- insight,
- independence
- relationships
- initiative
- humor
• creativity, and
• morality.

A close look at each of these terms and how the authors describe them reveals that they are very similar to other descriptions of protective factors found in the literature. Wolin and Wolin viewed resilience from an ecological perspective as have others (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1999; & Werner & Smith, 2001) in this field of study. The ecological perspective is primarily concerned with the interrelationship between the individual and his or her environment. Risk factors listed by Wolin and Wolin, are mostly related to the familial environment. Alcoholism, sexual abuse and physical neglect are three of the risks they discuss. Table 1 illustrates the risk factors mentioned by the researchers listed.
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<td>Parental divorce</td>
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<td>Parental alcoholism</td>
<td>Low S.E.S.</td>
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<td>Parental mental illness</td>
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<td>Exposure to Violence</td>
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<td>Low birth-weight</td>
<td>Poor genetic material</td>
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<td>Massive community trauma</td>
<td>Severe early privation</td>
<td>Confused family communication</td>
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<td>Maladaptive parent-child interactions</td>
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<td>Parental drug or alcohol addiction</td>
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The most frequently cited risk factors were those identified by Werner and Smith (2001). The most prevalent factors cited seemed to be those related to the familial environment. Although different researchers may use varying nomenclatures, most lists can be effectively reduced to the list of factors listed by Werner and Smith. The major difference exists between Ungar’s approach to the identification of risk factors and that of the other researchers on the list. Ungar (2004a) posed that because risk factors are contextual, individually constructed and differ across populations; they can be effectively listed only when the individual’s cultural context is taken into consideration and the meaning of his or her experience is investigated. He criticized the ecological approach to identifying risk factors so prevalent in resilience research. In his estimation, the latter comes from a Western perspective of risk and resilience that does not take into account alternative cultural views.

Rutter (1999) emphasized that the presence of one risk factor alone does not tend to have significant implications for the development of adverse conditions. Similarly, Masten (2001) promoted the idea that in order for an individual to be considered resilient, he or she must have encountered at least 4 risk factors. Masten’s proposition is consistent with the concept of negative chain effects introduced by Rutter (1999). For a negative chain effect to occur, several risk factors must be present simultaneously. These factors are believed to interact with each other thus yielding a significant level of danger to the normative psychosocial development of the individual. These are not exhaustive lists but they are comprehensive. To better understand the influence of protective factors on resilience, models of resilience have been developed.
Models of Resilience

Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) described three types of resilience models that explain the function that protective factors play in altering an individual’s course from risk exposure to negative outcomes. These are (a) compensatory, (b) protective, and (c) challenge.

In the compensatory model, a resilience factor counteracts or operates in an opposite direction to a risk factor. Therefore, the resilience factor has a direct effect on the outcome, one that is independent of the effect of the risk factor. Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) posed that alcohol abstinence or moderation is compensatory in the sense that it has been found to be directly and independently associated with a lower risk for youth suicide.

In the protective model, assets or resources reduce the effects of a risk on a negative outcome. Protective factors may operate in several ways to influence outcomes. They may help to neutralize the effects of risks (Rutter, 1999); they may weaken, but not completely remove them; or they may enhance the positive effect of another promotive factor. For example, while being drug-free is not directly associated with a lower suicide risk, it is associated with lower alcohol use. Consequently, being drug-free is a moderating factor in protecting youth from the risk of suicide (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

A third model of resilience is the challenge model. In this model, the association between a risk factor and an outcome is “curvilinear.” Exposure to any level of a risk factor is associated with negative outcomes, but moderate levels of the risk are related to
less negative outcomes. This model is not to be confused with Wolin and Wolin’s (1993) Challenge Model.

Wolin and Wolin (1993) observed that despite the damage focus in the field of psychology which generally viewed risk factors as determinant of deleterious outcomes, some individuals who had been exposed to parental alcoholism and dysfunctional family dynamics were able to form positive attachments with others and reframe their perceptions of themselves. They formed families whose environments were a far cry from the ones they knew as children. Additionally, they did not develop an alcohol dependency. Wolin and Wolin’s model is based on the premise that risks are counterbalanced with protective factors. This process acts as a moderator of life-outcomes for individuals.

Most of the resilience research has focused on the development of resilience in children and adolescents or on a retrospective look at the interface of risk and protective factors. My search did not reveal studies that included information on the meaning that educators assign to the construct of resilience, particularly Puerto Rican educators of Second Language Learners (SLLs), and how this impacts their practice and sense of self efficacy in helping students develop resilience.

Over the past four decades, there have been several stages in resilience research. From an initial focus on the invulnerable or invincible child (Werner & Smith, 1982), psychologists began to recognize that much of what seems to promote resilience originates outside of the individual (Rutter, 1999). This led to a search for resilience promotive factors at the individual, family and community levels. As mentioned earlier, most recently, researchers like Ungar (2008) for example, have highlighted the relevance
of entering the interplay of cultural factors into the resilience equation. Thus, in addition to the role that community and culture may play in the development of resilience in individuals, there is growing interest in the moderating factors and mechanisms in the development of resilience of entire communities and cultural groups.

**Quantitative Approaches to Resilience Research**

Proponents of quantitative research design have posed that quantitative data collection methods and data analysis have higher reliability and validity than those following the qualitative tradition. U.S. federal programs, particularly in education under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) are expected to only adopt programs and interventions in schools that are research-based. Funders in both the U.S. and Canada tend to favor quantitative design over qualitative (Ungar, 2006). Quantitative design is the sanctioned research tradition under NCLB (Lincoln & Canella, 2004).

At the top of the quantitative research design hierarchy is the true experimental research design which includes random sample selection, and experimental and control groups (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative methods allow researchers to gather statistical data that will yield descriptive information on the research variables purportedly without introducing researcher bias. Methods of data collection frequently include questionnaires, interviews with close-ended questions and web-based surveys (Creswell, 2005).

Masten (2001) described two quantitative models of resilience frequently used in quantitative resilience research. They are the variable-focused and person-focused models of resilience. The variable-focused model includes multivariate analyses, regression analyses, or analyses of covariance. Two and four group comparison, discriminant
function analyses, cluster analyses, and developmental pathways are part of the person-focused resilience model. Masten (2001) posed that Werner and Smith’s (1992) seminal study was a perfect example of the two group comparison methodology (see also Werner & Smith, 2001). Masten cautioned that the developmental pathways data analyses are the most difficult to undertake of the person-focused model methodologies for data analysis. Conversely, she praised their value in generating solid models for intervention programs.

Ungar (2005) did not seem to hold these methods in the same high regard. For example, he said that resilience research has been limited to designing interventions to develop resilience while forgetting the sense of agency of the people they are designed for. He said that even Werner and Smith’s seminal study did not make great strides in terms of services offered to children. Ungar (2005) argued that researchers ought to investigate youth’s expressed needs for developing resilience. He posed that seminal studies have mostly served to describe and examine variable upon variable without investigating how children’s interactions with services contribute to the development of resilience. Ungar’s focus seems to be the mediating mechanisms that Rutter wrote about in 2007.

Nevertheless, quantitative studies continue to abound in the field of resilience research (Ungar, 2006). The following are examples of studies that have used a quantitative approach to investigating resilience. The following represents a very small sample of the wide variety of topics that have been addressed in quantitative resilience research. There are many more, but as the popular adage goes, “Para muestra con un botón basta,” meaning that one button is enough for sampling the full set. Several examples of how the resilience construct has been approached from a quantitative
Como el cantar del coquí

perspective and a brief discussion on exciting new developments in quantitative methods instruments follow.

Masten et al. (1988) applied regression analysis to test the relationship between gender, intellectual ability, socioeconomic status (SES) and family qualities on school competence. This study had a normative sample consisting of 205 children between the ages of eight and thirteen from two elementary schools. In order to obtain an adequate measure of competence Masten et al. utilized both the Devereux Elementary School Behavior Scale (DESBS) and the Revised Class Play (RCP) and then conducted a factor analysis of participant responses for both instruments to obtain competence composites for their sample. The (DESBS) is a scale that yields a demarcation of children who exhibit maladaptive behaviors and poor school performance. It is administered to teachers. The RCP is an imaginary class play that requires children to cast their peers in one of thirty different roles. It is used to measure peer reputation which Masten et al. submitted has been found to be a valid assessment of child social competence and maladjustment. Masten et al. (1988) used school records and annual grades to measure academic achievement. Two subtests of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for children yielded a measure of the participants’ intellectual ability. They conducted three two hour interviews with parents and rated the responses using thirty global five point scales to measure parenting qualities.

Findings suggested that children with lower intellectual ability who are in the lower rungs of the socioeconomic continuum and whose parents exhibited poor parenting qualities, were generally more prone to display disruptive and or oppositional behaviors in school when under stress. Children under stress, who had high measures of
competence, higher SES status and a more positive family environment, were more likely to withdraw from peers and classroom activities rather than behave disruptively in school. Of particular interest were the variations of competence between the genders in relation to maternal parenting qualities. In this study, Masten et al. (1988) found that in the case of female children “the quality of maternal competence in parenting may be a crucial variable” (p.760).

Feinauer and Stuart (1996) studied the effects of attribution of blame on the recovery (resilience) of survivors of childhood sexual abuse with a random sample of 276 female survivors of sexual abuse. The quantitative model employed for the data analysis was variable-focused (Masten, 2001). The researchers administered the Trauma Symptom Checklist (TSC-33) to measure the level of symptomatology presented by the women in the sample. Additionally, Feinauer and Stuart administered a subset of items for the Williams McPearl Coping Scale with the addition of another, was utilized as measure of blame (Feinauer & Stuart, 1996). (For more information on the TSC-33 see www.scalesandmeasures.net/files/files/Trauma%20Symptom%20Check.pdf)

Feinauer and Stuart’s (1996) regression analyses pointed to the conclusion that even though all participants presented significant symptoms for maladjustment as a result of childhood sexual abuse, those who blamed the perpetrator had the lowest incidence of symptoms. They found that the women who attributed blame to themselves for the abuse fared the worst in terms of symptomatology, and those who attributed blame to their destiny or misfortune did not fare any better. These findings suggest that although blaming destiny or misfortune is an external attribution, it may be as disempowering for survivors of abuse as attributing blame internally by blaming themselves.
Lundman, et al. (2007) used descriptive, comparison, regression and factor analyses in their study. The purpose of this study was to expound the underlying structure of the Swedish version of Wagnild and Young’s Resilience Scale (RS) and to study resilience as it relates to age (Lundman et al). (For more information on the Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale see Wagnild & Young, 1993.) The sample in the study was composed of a set of eight subsamples. Some were randomly selected and others were not. The total number of participants was 1248 females and 471 males ranging in age from 19 to 103 years of age. Lundman, et al.’s analyses of the data obtained from the participants’ responses to the Swedish version of the RS revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between age and resilience. This suggests that resilience increases with age.

Tatar and Amram (2007) used factor analysis, linear regression, and multivariate regression analyses to study adolescent psychological resilience. They specifically investigated the relationship between coping strategies in regards to terrorist attacks in a random sample of 330 Israeli adolescents. They found that male adolescents had a higher tendency than females to adopt non-productive coping strategies such as ignoring the problem. Findings suggested that females tend to be more open to seeking social support than males. Tatar and Amram concluded that the adolescents, who reported higher levels of media exposure, generally used less productive coping strategies than those reporting less exposure to media reports on terrorism. A negative correlation between life satisfaction and non-productive coping strategies was noted by the researchers.

In 2008, Kallampally et al. used regression and correlational analyses to pinpoint the predictive quality of psychological resilience, acculturation, spirituality, and other
independent variables on marital satisfaction. The non-random sample was composed of 57 men and 52 women who were Asian Indian-born American U. S. immigrants with five or more years of U. S. residency. Kallampally and his team administered five scales with established validity and reliability. One of those was the Ego Resiliency Scale (ERS) used to measure resilience. (For more information on the ERS see Block, & Kremen, 1996.) The ERS measures resilience by assessing the individual’s ability to manage changes in daily life. Findings suggested that gender, psychological resilience, acculturation, and spirituality when combined, predicted marital satisfaction. Kallampally et al. found spirituality to be particularly significant in predicting marital satisfaction for this group.

A developing field in quantitative resilience research is the investigation of the role that biological mediating or protective factors may play in the development of resilience. In 2003, Curtis and Cicchetti drafted a theoretical framework for studying the relationship between biological factors and resilience. They posed that descriptions of the characteristics, processes and interactions present in the psychosocial and environmental dimensions of resilience have been prolifically studied. They advocated for the study of the relationships and contributions of human neurobiological systems to the development of resilience.

Curtis and Cicchetti (2003) cautioned that the idea is to access a more holistic approach to the study of resilience. They wrote about developments in medical instrumentation that might contribute to new and groundbreaking resilience research. Fast forward six years and we find exciting research making great contributions to this field of study. For example, cortisol secretion is being studied to establish its relationship with
context inappropriate expressions of anger in children (Locke, Davidson, Kalin & Goldsmith, 2009).

Bauer, Hanson, Ronald, Pierson, and Pollak (2009) recently published an article on a study conducted to investigate the “effects of early deprivation on the human cerebellum and the association between cerebellar development and components of cognitive functioning” (p. 1104). Bauer et al. found a statistically significant discrepancy in the volume of the left and right superior-posterior cerebellar lobe of the post-institutionalized adolescents (experimental group) as compared to the same cerebellar region of adolescents in the control group. Their findings suggested that contrary to the prior belief that the cerebellum only mediated motor functions, the superior and posterior regions of the cerebellum are associated with specific cognitive functions.

Both of these studies have implications for resilience research. The resilience literature suggests that children with easy temperaments tend to elicit more positive responses from peers and adults (Werner & Smith, 1982). Studies like Locke et al. (2009) have the potential to inform resilience research in the social sciences and interventions that address the whole human being. Bauer et al. has implications for social services, education and juvenile detention programs. As suggested by Curtis and Cicchetti’s (2003) article, failing to work together across the disciplines to research resilience may result in a costly venture in terms of insights missed and their potential for informing interventions that could have the power to change lives. Resilience research has entered an era that seems to be full of promise for scholars who are passionate about finding the essence of what resilience is and how it develops.
Establishing the relationships between mediating mechanisms has proven to be a useful tool in resilience research, but understanding what it means for those who experience the phenomenon requires a different type of approach. That is the domain of qualitative methodologies where the search for understanding the human experience is a primary goal (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

**Qualitative Approaches to Resilience Research**

Qualitative research found its beginnings in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and clinical psychology (for a more comprehensive list see Piirto, 2002b). The basic premise of qualitative data collection and analysis is that there is no such thing as a universal truth. Something that is true for one person is not necessarily true for another. Truth results from the meaning that human beings derive from their personal experiences within their unique circumstances and in their particular place on a time continuum (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002).

The primary objective in qualitative research is to understand what a phenomenon means to the participants. To this effect, data collection happens in naturalistic settings and direct contact with people. Instruments generated by others are seldom used, as the researcher is the principal data gathering instrument in this research tradition. The focus here is not on the preconceived notions of the researcher or those espoused in the literature. Traditionally researchers have used interviews with open-ended questions, documents, and observations (Creswell 2009; Gibbs 2007; Patton, 2002) listed video diaries, electronic mail, web pages, still photographs and chat-group transcripts among other forms of qualitative data. Qualitative inquiry suggests that the researcher try to
enter the data collection experience as a *tabula rasa*, free of preconceived perceptions that could interfere with the reception of meaning contained in the participants’ stories (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). However, poststructuralists rightly suggest there is always bias.

Data analysis in qualitative research follows an inductive method where the researcher reviews the data collected from interviews, documents and observations, and interprets it to find the themes that represent the entire data set (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007). Patton (2002) said that the qualitative researchers’ methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity are three determining factors in the value of the qualitative data in a study.

Qualitative research findings may be presented in a wide variety of creative ways Finley (2005). The most common are discussions of the salient themes with embedded participant quotations (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007). Roosa (2000) argued that qualitative research methodologies have the potential for shedding light on relevant interactions between moderating mechanisms that regression and variance analyses may fail to capture. Creswell, (2009) listed strategies of inquiry in the qualitative research tradition. They are narrative research, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory studies and case studies. The following studies are examples of how qualitative methodology has been applied to the study of resilience.

Qualitative research studies on resilience have covered topics across the spectrum of human psychosocial behavior (Curtis & Cicchetti, 2003). For example, Ungar and Teram (2000) conducted a grounded theory study to investigate the impact of empowerment discourse in the development of resilience in high-risk teenagers. Their
sample consisted of 41 teenagers. All teenagers had experienced at least three of
following risk factors, poverty, parental or caregiver mental illness, physical, sexual
abuse, family violence, neglect, intellectual and physical challenges, depression, or
addiction (Ungar & Teram, 2000).

Ungar and Teram (2000) conducted two interviews with each adolescent in their
sample regarding issues of empowerment and mental health. Focus groups with parents
and other professionals were held and a review of the adolescents’ clinical files
completed. The adolescents were given a copy of the transcript of their first interview to
check for accuracy and researchers had a third party audit of the data for the first set of
interviews. They concluded that helping high-risk adolescents participate in activities that
allow them to engage in social discourse would encourage their empowerment. These
experiences provided them with options for rejecting and replacing the negative labels
imposed on them by others and redefining themselves in light of their strengths.

While not infected with the virus that causes the disease, each child in their sample of 25
children ranging in ages from 10 to 18, had at least one parent who was either HIV
positive, had full blown AIDS or had died from the disease. These children were part of
children’s center that was a part of a women’s center offering free medical and clinical
support to HIV patients. Pivnik and Villegas completed clinical assessments and
ethnographic interviews with their sample for a period of six months. They utilized the
Beck Depression Inventory as one of their data collection tools. Pivnik and Villegas
stated that most children in the sample were depressed. Safer sex education, drugs, loss,
grief, failure of external systems, particularly school, foster care and legal custody were
some of the themes that emerged from their data. The children in Pivnik and Villegas’ sample did not report high risk sexual behaviors or engaging in high risk substance abuse. The authors concluded participation in a multigenerational community based program model as the one in this study, may play a mitigating role for youth experiencing difficulty in school.

Montgomery, Winterowd, Jeffries, and Baysden (2000) studied academic resilience factors of Native Indian individuals related to university retention. Their convenience sample was comprised of 14 students and graduates representing more than a dozen Native American Indian Tribes. Montgomery et al. used 1 hour interviews as their primary source of data collection. Themes included “internalized resiliency characteristics, ways of learning, developing an academic identity, and perceptions of social support systems” (p.389). Montgomery et al. concluded that the ability and opportunity to integrate conventional wisdom through self-talk and Indian ways of learning into the university environment may positively impact retention of American Indian students in higher education. Other promotive factors that they suggested may increase American Indian student retention in higher education, was having positive perceptions regarding the social support systems available to them. These included family support as well as tribal.

Like Pivnik and Villegas (2000), Hunter (2001) also studied resilience with adolescents, but from a different perspective. She conducted a qualitative comparison study of a sample of 40 adolescents. Twenty were American teenagers and the other twenty were Ghanaian. The data for her study were collected through focus groups and a writing activity. Hunter’s rigorous data analysis procedures yielded 300 statements from
which 11 themes emerged that she was able to classify under 5 categories; these were loss, environment, behavioral response, ego strength, and resilience. Hunter concluded that resilience can be a hurtful process for adolescents. There may be several dimensions to the phenomenon of resilience. She said that although self-protective resilience and survival resilience are not meant to be long term processes, they are the only type of resilience that adolescents who lack environmental/family support know.

Hunter (2001) found that the sample living in Ghana, although more lacking in economic resources than their American counterparts, reported being happier and experienced connected resilience, suggesting that the quality of support and close family ties may have accounted for the difference in psychosocial health between the two groups. Hunter stated that her findings seem to suggest that having a caring, consistent and loving adult to guide youth toward the path to resilience may indeed be a moderating factor.

Caregivers and family environment have been identified as moderating factors in the development of resilience (Hunter, 2001; Masten, 2001; Moe, Johnson, & Wade, 2007; Werner & Smith, 1982). As an example, Cohen, Slonim, Finzi and Leichtentritt (2002) conducted a grounded theory study to investigate family resilience through the perspectives of Israeli mothers. This was a convenience sample of 15 Israeli mothers in Tel-Aviv whose families had experienced a life disrupting event within the year prior to the study. These events or crises included natural, accidental and violent death, health issues, marriage dissolution, and accidental work injury. The women in the sample ranged from age 21 to 46. One interview was done with each woman, and the length of the interviews varied between 1 and 4 hours. Researchers coded the data independently
first and then collaboratively to ensure accuracy of salient themes. Cohen et al. identified expressiveness or open communication about the crises between family members, connectedness, and flexibility in family roles as components of family resilience described by the participants. Optimism and a good sense of humor as well as the importance of maintaining core family values in interpersonal interactions during a crisis were also identified by the participants as essential to family resilience. Within these, trust and a sense of security were also stressed.

All of these studies interviewed their participants in order to access stories about their experiences with a particular phenomenon or problem presented. The stories and meanings by the participants provided the data for analysis. Although the qualitative studies included in this and other sections of this literature review reported the data in narrative form, integrating participant quotes to support the discussions (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007), there are alternative forms of presenting qualitative data. A controversial issue involving qualitative research which has a direct impact on resilience research is the quantitative versus qualitative methodologies dichotomy.

**Mixed Methods Studies of Resilience**

Qualitative research methods have gained considerable momentum in recent decades. Traditionally, quantitative methods have constituted the preferred mode of scholarly inquiry. These preferences repeatedly placed scholars interested in conducting qualitative research in a defensive position as they, more often than not, encountered significant pressure to make a case for the legitimacy of qualitative research design (Creswell, 2009). Given the current progress in the acceptance of qualitative methods as a
legitimate path to scholarly inquiry, one might not expect proponents of this approach to find themselves immersed in a sea of contradiction.

Much of the tension resides in that qualitative methods have been implicitly discouraged by gatekeepers responsible for doling out funds to conduct research and by our federal government. Federal guidelines for research, particularly in education, sanction and encourage a positivist approach. Lincoln and Canella (2004) argued and Denzin and Lincoln (2005) agreed that quantitative methods’ lack of appropriateness and effectiveness in the field of education has been evidenced. They posited that qualitative research methods equip researchers to delve into the human experience to retrieve data that positivist methods would fail to uncover.

Rutter (2007) advocated for the marriage of qualitative and quantitative research methods for the generation of hypotheses regarding the study of mediating mechanisms in resilience development. An ever growing number of studies are employing a mixed methods research approach to the study of resilience; sometimes for reasons beyond the ones expressed by Rutter. As stated earlier, qualitative research proposals do not receive the same level of funding consideration as quantitative ones (Lincoln & Canella, 2004; Ungar, 2006). Notwithstanding, some qualitative studies do get funded (Ungar, 2006).

In some cases, funders’ preferences regarding research designs drive scholars to engage in conducting mixed methods studies as a strategy for accessing funding. For example, Ungar (2006) wrote about the problems that qualitative researchers face when applying for funding. He suggested combining qualitative and quantitative methods as one of four strategies for navigating through this dilemma. A case in point is the International Resilience Project (IRP) that he leads. This longitudinal international
The purpose of the IRP was to understand more in depth how youth successfully cope with the adversities within their cultural context. The IRP made use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods within a cross-cultural framework to examine different interactional processes and systems that resilience research findings suggest relate to the development of resilience. During the first phase of the study, the IRP team used a mixed methods approach to collect data with over 1500 children in 14 communities in five continents.

Data were collected by means of qualitative interviews with youth and adults regarding obstacles that youth confront in accessing different types of services and who or what they rely on for help in working through these obstacles. The data collected were then populated to create a survey as a quantitative measure for the topic of investigation: The 58-item version of the The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM) was tested with 1451 youth in fourteen communities from eleven countries. This allowed the group to reduce the instrument to its current 28-item version making it an instrument that can be measured for validity and reliability (International Resilience Project, 2009; Ungar, 2006).

The CYRM was employed in another mixed methods study conducted by Ungar, (2008). This time he and his team of researchers investigated the construct of resilience from a cultural perspective with a convenience sample of 694 males and 757 females across 12 cities around the world. They used both interview data and the statistical data from the CYRM to arrive at their conclusion that resilience results from the interplay of
global aspects in children’s lives that are specific to their culture and context. Thus resilience may have different manifestations depending on the culture and context of the individual that may not necessarily fit with the Western definition of what resilience looks like.

Among other researchers who have used a mixed methods approach to resilience research are Osterling and Hines (2006). These researchers conducted a study that explored the benefits for older adolescents of a program designed as an intervention for preparing them for the transition from foster care to independent living. They used a questionnaire and descriptive statistics to obtain data on the description of the 52 adolescents and the 52 advocates in the study. Qualitative data were collected through interviews and focus groups and coded for significant themes. The authors concluded that the program was successful and that for the youths involved, feeling connected with their advocate helped them feel better prepared to go out on their own. Osterling and Hines’ findings are consistent with other researchers’ findings (Hunter, 2001; Masten, 2001; Moe et al., 2007; Werner & Smith, 1982, 2001) regarding the role that nurturing relationships play in developing resilience.

**Resilience Research with Puerto Ricans/Latinos**

Puerto Ricans are a population that is underrepresented in the resilience literature. The resilience literature revealed very little information regarding Puerto Ricans and resilience. Most of the studies classify diverse groups of Latinos or minorities together (see Bathum & Ciofu-Bauman, 2007; Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Rivera, Guarnaccia, Mulvaney-Day, Lin, Torres, & Alegria, 2008; Spencer-Rogers & Collins, 2006). For
example, Reis, Colbert and Hébert (2005) conducted a 3 year comparative case study with 35 ethnically diverse students to investigate the factors that led to the achievement and underachievement of gifted urban high school students. Reis et al. reported that the achieving students had a high sense of self-efficacy, they were success driven, independent, sensitive, had an internal locus of control and an appreciation for cultural diversity. They had access and used support systems available to them such as honors level classes, connections with high achieving peers and family and adult support. These networks were essential in most cases for their academic success. The adult support included coaches, teachers, counselors and administrators. Parental support was in the form of high expectations, the expressed belief in education as a socioeconomic status upward mobility tool, but parental active participation in school was low. This seems to suggest that the most significant part of parental support for student achievement takes part at home.

Payne (2008) made a similar claim when she said that we should avoid confusing parents’ physical presence at school with parental involvement. She stated that the type of parental involvement that makes a positive difference happens from home by way of support and expectations. Although others have questioned the research base for Payne’s espoused teachings on poverty and student achievement (Bomer, Dworin, May & Semingson, 2008), in this case, Reis et al.’s (2005) findings support Payne’s assertions regarding parental involvement. High achieving students in Reis et al.’s study were active in extracurricular and summer enrichment programs and were thoughtful regarding their choice of advanced placement courses. These findings are consistent with those of
Borman and Overman (2004) who conducted a study on academic resiliency in poor and minority students.

Low achieving students in Reis et al. (2005) found school activities boring and ill fitting to their preferred learning mode and frequently received disciplinary action for their behavior in school. These students had underdeveloped coping mechanisms. Thus dealing with negative issues and experiences within the family, resisting negative peer influences, self regulating their behavior and networking with positive peers was very hard for them. Overall, low achieving students did not have clear or realistic aspirations. Parental expectations were inconsistent and monitoring of school work and unstructured time, inadequate. This is consistent with Prelow, Loukas, and Jordan-Green’s (2007) study with a sample of 464 Latino (Puerto Rican and Mexican) mother and child dyads. Their findings suggested that family environments that are not chaotic, where monitoring is high and routines are not haphazard seem to foster social competence from high risk environments. Brooks, Balka, Fei and Whiteman (2006) found that the Puerto Rican parents in a study of the effects of parental use of tobacco and marijuana on child rearing set more rules for their children than the African American parents in the study. Prelow et al. concluded that parenting practices predict child competence and adjustment.

It bears mentioning that some of the achieving students in Reis et al. (2005) had family issues similar to those of the underachieving students. The researchers found that the achieving students, however, had developed coping mechanisms that served as a protective factor against the risk posed by the familial environment. Reis et al. did not offer disaggregated data on their sample of 35 students. The researchers simply used the descriptor *ethnically diverse*. 
Rivera et al. (2008) said that the practice of not disaggregating the data to describe findings in studies with mixed groups of Latinos ignores the differences that exist between the groups. Riojas-Clark and Bustos-Flores (2001) stated that could lead to erroneous conclusions about a specific group. For example, Rivera et al. measured family cohesion and family conflict in relation to psychological distress with 2,450 Latinos of different ethnicities. Findings differed for family cohesion when aggregated and disaggregated data were compared. Specifically, the statistical values for the whole group suggested that family cohesion was high for all Latinos, but the disaggregated data revealed a statistically significant discrepancy between the Mexican and Puerto Rican subgroups. For the Puerto Ricans in this sample, family cohesion was not high and neither was family culture conflict. Family culture conflict happens when adopted values from the dominant culture clash with the family’s ethnic values as a result of acculturation.

**Acculturation and Other Terminologies**

Acculturation is another area of research where the practice of lumping Latinos of different ethnicities has been common (Tropp, Erkut, García-Coll, Alarcón & Vázquez, 1999). We will revisit the concept of acculturation momentarily, but first it is paramount to recall what sets Puerto Ricans apart from other Latino groups and second, to define the designators that will be used in this study.

Although Puerto Ricans are Latinos, as mentioned earlier, our political status as a colony of the United States sets us apart from other Latino groups in several ways
(Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Duany, 2002). Puerto Ricans are American citizens from birth. Because we are born American citizens, we can travel to and from our native land and work, reside, or visit either one without the need for a visa. For this reason, Puerto Ricans show increased mobility patterns as compared to other Latinos (Rivera et al. 2008). As discussed in the first chapter, these rights were conferred to us as a result of the Jones Act of 1917 (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Duany, 2002; Trias-Monge, 1997).

Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary defines *Latino* as, “a native or inhabitant of Latin America” and as “a person of Latin-American origin living in the United States” (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/latino), January 19, 2010). It defines *Hispanic* as “of, or relating to the people, speech, or culture of Spain or of Spain and Portugal” and “of, relating to, or being a person of Latin American descent living in the United States; especially: one of Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican origin (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Hispanic, January 19, 2010).

For the purposes of this study, the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic* will be used interchangeably to designate a person of Central American, South American, or Caribbean descent whose vernacular is Spanish. This does not exclude Puerto Ricans. The term *Latinos* will be understood to be inclusive of both genders unless a gender-specific issue is being discussed. When specifically discussing a person or group of the female gender, the term *Latina* or its plural form *Latinas* will be employed. Marotta and García (2003) used the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably. They expressed a preference for the former, as they posed that the latter was a creation of the U. S. Census. Duany said that Puerto Ricans generally tend to self identify as Puerto Rican without
hyphenating their nationality as we sometimes find with other Latino groups. In this study Puerto Rican will designate a person, male or female, who was born in Puerto Rico or of Puerto Rican parents.

Whether the designation of choice is Latino, Hispanic or Puerto Rican, one cannot help but notice that many of the titles of research studies addressing issues with this population seem to depart from a deficits perspective as suggested by the language of their titles. For example, a study examining the relationship between discrimination and stress was entitled, *Discrimination, Stress and Acculturation among Dominican Immigrant Women* (italics added) (Araújo-Dawson, 2009). Reyes et al., (2008) studied *Neighborhood Disorganization, Substance Use, and Violence among Adolescents in Puerto Rico* (Italics added). This was a study investigating the connection between poor neighborhoods in San Juan, Puerto Rico and violent behavior in adolescents. Soto and Shaver (1982) studied the relationship between acculturation and other variables as they related to Puerto Rican women. The title for their study, *Sex-Role, Traditionalism, Assertiveness, and Symptoms of Puerto Rican Women Living in the United States* and *The Plight of Extremely Poor Puerto Rican and Non-Hispanic White Single Mothers*, (italics added) a quantitative study by Bassuk, Perloff, and Garcia-Coll, (1998) that employed a comparison analysis of the socioeconomic, psychosocial and health attributes of Puerto Rican and Non-Hispanic Caucasian single mothers.

Other titles are neither here nor there as in the case of *Family and Fertility in Puerto Rico* (italics added) (Stycos, 1952), and *Language Development and Nonverbal IQ of Puerto Rican Preschool Children in New York City* (italics added) by Anastasi and DeJesús (1953). Although these vintage study titles on Puerto Ricans reported on issues
that were not so encouraging, the titles themselves do not seem to convey stereotypical language that could reinforce cultural biases that someone perusing through a reference list could possess. Very few titles were void of deficits-related speech. The most positive title I encountered was, *Examining Familial-Based Academic Success Factors in Urban High School Students: The Case of Puerto Rican Female High Achievers* (italics added) (Antrop-Gonzalez, Vélez, & Garrett, 2008). This title seems to exude empowerment; but what may the others be saying about the social sciences research field, its implicit beliefs, dynamics of power, social elitism, or hidden agendas? That question is better left for self reflection, at least for the meantime.

Sometimes researchers inadvertently choose words that place an added load on the already burdened shoulders of an oppressed people (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). It is likely that that is the case with these titles. Thus it is not surprising that at first sight it seemed like very little had been written about strengths in this population. A closer examination of the above mentioned studies revealed descriptions of risk and protective factors related to Latinos. Some of these studies, however, fail to articulate how the study relates to resilience, specifically how the presence of risk factors was measured.

Rutter (2006) made a distinction between the study of risk and protective factors and resilience research. He posed that the former is a part of the process of the latter and that they are not interchangeable. He defined resilience as “an interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite these experiences" (p. 2). Masten (2001) argued that resilience cannot exist in the absence of risk factors. So, how do we reconcile these
definitions with the cultural context of the individual if what seems like a risk or a positive outcome in one context may not be deemed as so in another (Ungar, 2008)?

Choi, Meininger, and Roberts (2006) conducted a study with a mixed population of minority adolescents to measure social stress. Their interest grew out of the premise that minority groups have been found to be at high risk for experiencing physical manifestations of stress, depressive disorders and suicidal ideation. Of the three groups, African American, Hispanic and Asian American, Hispanic Americans were found to have higher levels of social stress. Conversely, one may be tempted to argue, and Rutter (2007) and Masten (2001) would disagree, that the condition of being Latino qualifies an individual as resilient if he or she is not exhibiting maladaptive behaviors.

Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) led a phenomenological study with seven Puerto Rican high achieving urban high school females. The researchers wrote about the criteria used to measure high academic achievement, but made no mention of criteria to identify risk factors. Perhaps that is why the term resilience is neither featured on the title of their study nor in the abstract. Their perspective was Puerto Ricans and academic success. The participants in this study were enrolled in honors courses and had a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or greater. From their stories we learned that very few of them had parents who had graduated from high school and not only did one of their fathers have no more than an eighth grade education, he was impaired and unable to work. Researchers have found low parental education to be a risk factor (Werner & Smith, 1982).

Additionally, two of the young women in Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) had moved at least once back from Puerto Rico to the U. S. during their school life experience. This reflects a common pattern of Puerto Rican migration (Rivera et al.,
Based on insights gleaned from the research, this could qualify as a life disruptive event (Richardson, 2002). For example, findings from an ethnographic study conducted to investigate the sense of community among Latinas suggested that moving into a new country involves issues of loss related to the individual’s sense of community as defined by her native cultural point of view (Bathum & Ciofu-Bauman, 2007). Leaving one’s native culture to become immersed into another that is quite different from one’s own can cause a person to experience adjustment problems (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001).

Bathum and Ciofu-Bauman (2007) concluded that Latinas seem to go through a four step process in order to reframe their sense of community. First, they must come to terms with their loss of community. Second, they need to figure out what is stopping them from feeling connected to their new community. Third, they need to be willing to engage in activities that foster a sense of community, and fourth, they need to develop a sense of "trust in the new community’s influence” (p.172). For example the women identified racist, envious, and classist attitudes within Latinos in the U. S. as impediments to developing emotional connections to other Latinas. It is possible that as one subgroup views the other as of less value, the dynamic that occurs between minority groups and the dominant culture is reenacted. As discussed in chapter 1, race plays a role in the process of acculturation (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

One of the young ladies in Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) was six months pregnant at the time of the interviews. Would she qualify as resilient? One could argue that she was because she stayed in school despite being pregnant and had projections to finish high school and pursue a post-secondary degree. Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) did not misrepresent their research, but the question lingers. Could their participants be
identified as resilient? Ungar (2008) argued that in order to effectively define resilience it must be framed within a cultural context and contended that the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM) developed by his team with a large widely multicultural sample, and used in his international study fills this gap.

Alternatively, Clauss-Ehlers (2008) proposed a different measure. Clauss-Ehlers examined the limitations of existing measures of resilience and declared that a new instrument to measure cultural resilience was warranted. She selected a mixed sample of 305 college students to test the instrument. The group was comprised of self-identified, African-Americans, Asian Americans, Whites, and Latinas with Latinas representing 18% of the sample. She concluded that culture and diversity can be promotive factors in the development of resilience and advocated the use of the Cultural Resilience Measure (CRM) as an effective tool to assess cultural factors that relate to coping and to the phenomenon of resilience in adolescents and adults of different ethnic and racial origins.

Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) found that the participants in their study attributed their academic success to 4 main factors. The first factor was religiosity and extracurricular activities. These served as sources for building social capital. Participating in activities like church youth group and retreats, sports, band, and volunteer work among others, allowed the students to gather with like-minded youth from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and avoid negative peer influences.

Having a clear sense of their Puerto Rican identity and being able to affirm and maintain it constituted a second major theme. Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff (2007) found a positive correlation between adolescent ethnic identity exploration and resolution and self esteem. The participants in Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) reported using emotions
elicited by discrimination experienced at school to challenge themselves and to prove that Puerto Ricans too can excel academically.

Research has suggested that dominant group denigration of a cultural minority group tends to have a positive effect on the self-esteem of the minority group by way of the affirmation of their in-group qualities (Ward et al., 2001). Spencer-Rogers and Collins (2006) conducted a study whose findings further illustrate this cultural phenomenon. These researchers studied the relations between the perceptions of 198 Latino college students regarding cultural group disadvantage and participants’ self-esteem. Their findings suggested that for Latinos, the deleterious effects of discrimination seem to be counterbalanced by “racial centrality, group attachment and private regard” (p. 735).

The third and fourth success factor that emerged from the data was related to maternal influences on their academic achievement and the maternal role as a facilitator of social capital development. Mothers helped with homework, securing help when they could not provide it. They encouraged their daughters to respond to prejudice in school by using it as a challenge to succeed. Several mothers secured scholarship and college entrance exam practice materials and information for their daughters and set high expectations for school performance and for participation in postsecondary education. They were described as someone that the participants could confide in. Mothers encouraged them to participate in extracurricular activities, making them instrumental to the young women’s development of social capital. These findings are consistent with earlier studies with other groups that emphasized the protective value of caring, nurturing parents or caretakers in promoting youth resilience (Hunter, 2001; Ungar, 2004b; Werner
& Smith, 1982) and the promotive qualities of mother and daughter relationships (Masten et al., 1988). Indeed, familial environment plays a relevant role as a promotive factor for success.

**Puerto Rican Families**

Folk wisdom tells us that Latino families are close-knit units where maintaining the integrity of the connections between family members is a primordial goal. As it goes, each one of us could refute that statement or support it depending on our own familial history; however, some research does exist related to Latino families which elucidate this issue.

Fitzpatrick, (1987) cited an unpublished study that led him to compare Puerto Rican addicts and non-addicts (Fitzpatrick, Martin, Levine, & Brown, 1978) which revealed a surprising finding. Although the researchers had hypothesized that single parent and two parent families would be the significant family variable, the extended family variable yielded the highest statistical significance suggesting that the influence of the extended family served as a protective factor against drug addiction for Puerto Rican youth.

Fitzpatrick (1987) said that as a result of the changes in the Puerto Rican family structure, youths frequently live in single parent homes without the support and monitoring of uncles, godparents, cousins, grandparents and others living in close proximity and willing to assist with childrearing. He predicted that family cohesion would decrease and family conflict increase as a result of these and other structural changes affecting the Puerto Rican family unit. In 2008, Rivera et al. confirmed his
prediction when they found that for Puerto Ricans in their study family culture conflict was high, and family cohesion was low. Fitzpatrick submitted earlier that “the question of family solidarity is closely related to mental health” (1987, p. 88). Rivera et al. (2008) found that for Puerto Ricans, family cohesion and family culture conflict were not significantly related to psychological distress. Socioeconomic status and education emerged as the most significant moderators of psychological distress in Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican’s reported the highest level of psychological distress among the groups.

Acculturation has been defined as “a phenomenon that occurs when people from different cultures come into continuous first hand contact with each other” (Batham & Ciofu-Bauman, 2007, p.174). Anthropological and social perspectives maintain that change and power relations are an integral part of the acculturation process. Hence, the position that acculturation is a process in which the change that is produced in either or both distinctive cultural groups largely depends on the power relationship between the two (Padilla, 1995). Padilla, a pioneer in this field, submitted that this change effect can occur at the group and or at the individual level.

Some researchers have studied Latino families from the vantage point of acculturation and in some cases have found differences among different subgroups of Latinos. For example, in their review of the literature, Rivera et al. (2008) found that the level of acculturation has been linked with higher levels of psychological stress. As Latino families ingress into the U. S. cultural venue, traditional family roles are sometimes challenged. This is likely to affect power relations within the family structure. They further stated that weakened family ties that may result from high levels of acculturation may interfere with the role of family cohesion in moderating conflict within
Como el cantar del coquí

the family structure. Rivera et al. concluded that it is possible that Puerto Rico’s political history with the United States has resulted in Puerto Ricans having had more intense socialization into mainstream U.S. culture. This socialization may have led Puerto Ricans to refuse to adhere to traditional family expectations that would have a positive impact on family cohesion, but a negative one on their ability to as a unit, successfully manage family culture conflict.

One cannot speak about the Puerto Rican family without entering into a discussion about traditional gender roles. Stycos, (1952), Fitzpatrick (1987) and Suárez-Findlay (1999) told compelling tales about Puerto Rican sex or gender roles. Two terms intimately related to the issue of Puerto Rican family are *machismo* and *Marianismo*. Spanish-Catholicism greatly influenced the definition of gender roles in Puerto Rico. Plain and simple, every nuance of gender relations was predicated on the belief that men were superior and women inferior.

Being *macho* afforded men liberties, rights, and privileges whereby philandering was not only socially tolerated, but encouraged through an implicit fraternity that left women with very little recourse to obtain social system support. Women were essentially owned from birth. They were first the property of their fathers and then of their husbands. Physical and sexual abuse were attributed to the males’ responsibility to keep the women in line and in the case of the husbands, their right to obtain sexual gratification at will, with or without the consent of the female. The man was expected to provide the financial support for his family, and in turn the woman had the obligation to ensure that household domestic affairs were meticulously taken care of and her conjugal duties fulfilled on demand and with utter disregard for her desires.
In order to gain a historical perspective of Puerto Rican gender roles a stroll through the findings from Stycos’ (1952) comparison study of gender roles over five decades ago may provide some interesting insights. He found the manifestation of machismo to be similar between the upper class men and the lower classes. Extramarital affairs, fathering illegitimate children, rendezvous with prostitutes, drinking, and for the poor class male in particular, showing off the number of children fathered served as proxy measures for virility. The woman, body and soul belonged to the man to do with her as he pleased (Stycos). Suárez-Findlay’s (1999) research findings on the role of women in Puerto Rico’s colonial history support Styco’s conclusions.

More recently researchers have found that second generation Puerto Rican women had achieved a higher educational level and exhibited less gender role traditionalism than their first generation counterparts despite the traditional and socially enforced inhibition of assertiveness in Puerto Rican women (Soto & Shaver, 1982). Nevertheless, they also found that Puerto Rican women who had strong religious ties, tended to be more sex role traditional than their more acculturated cohorts. Rivera et al. (2008) posited that traditional roles in the Latino family structure are frequently altered as a result of migration and that migration is likely to affect the power relations within the family composition.

Suárez-Findlay (1999) and Stycos (1952), as well as others (Fitzpatrick, 1987; Stevens, 1973) have discussed the dichotomy of gender–based socialization in Puerto Rico. For example, permissiveness was the key feature of male socialization. For the female, the *cult of virginity* dictated that she would never be unsupervised and that she would be raised to be a decent, obedient wife and abnegated mother whose only interest
in sexual activity would be for procreation. Any woman, who expressed deriving personal gratification from the act, faced the scorn of other women and sometimes the calumny of being deemed sick (Stykos). *Purity, honor, chastity,* and *deflower* are words that find common ground in the discourse of the virginity cult. Suárez-Findlay found court records where the issue of a woman’s virginity and measures for reparation through marriage, were openly discussed in the presence of public audiences. She posed that the plight of women did not improve much after the U. S. occupation of the Island. She also emphatically asserted that throughout its history women at different levels of the economic stratum, some overtly and others covertly, challenged the beliefs of the time.

Stevens (1973) suggested that some women demonize men for exhibiting the behaviors that they (the women) have engaged in perpetuating through the socialization of their children. He claimed that he coined the term *Marianism* (*Marianismo*) to represent this phenomenon that he said is a form of secular feminism which finds its inspiration in the Virgin Mary. Stykos (1952), years before that, wrote about the Puerto Rican women and how the only thing they had left to feed their self-concept was in essence their martyrdom, a coping mechanism that allowed them to deal with their husbands’ abuse and infidelity, preserving some dignity in the process. This role had a built-in reward that was the strong bond that resulted between sons and mothers as a result of mother’s direct influence and the fathers’ emotional and physical distance.

Rondón (2003) denounced Marianismo as an ill: the legacy of Spanish-Catholic colonization that has reached out from the 19th century well into the 21st, to terrorize women. He described the plight of women in Latin American countries like Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru. The incidence of violent crimes against women, the number of
females imprisoned for drug trafficking, and low literacy levels keep rising. Psychological distress, female illegal drug use, and the use and abuse of tranquilizers combined with almost non-existent levels of support from their families and partners are all vestiges of a set of beliefs that in this day and age ought to be a thing of the past.

The double standards of Puerto Rican traditional gender roles still exist, but acculturation has caused shifts in their manifestation. Soto and Shaver (1982) conducted a path analysis with a sample of 278 first and second generation Puerto Rican women. They investigated the relationship among the variables of generation, education, assertiveness and sex-role traditionalism. The variable of assertiveness was included because Puerto Rican women have been traditionally inhibited from displaying it. They found that the higher the level of education of the women had the greatest impact on sex-role traditionalism, although the generational variable also impacted sex-role traditionalism. High sex-role traditionalism was associated with lower assertiveness. The women who scored high on assertiveness had lower symptom scores that included lower scores on the depression scale. A logical finding in this study related to religion. Women who had a higher religious involvement also had higher sex-role traditionalism scores.

Soto and Shaver (1982) concluded that Puerto Rican women may be more likely than non Puerto Ricans to display more traditional sex-role behaviors even after acculturating. They highlighted the relevance to educating Puerto Rican women and providing them with assertiveness training. They also pointed out that the farrago of negative issues that afflict poverty-stricken Puerto Rican women may cause them to experience symptoms otherwise associated with illness, clinicians as well as other social institutions must consider the effects that gender-role traditionalism, acculturation,
migration and assertiveness on women’s symptomatology. Not doing so could lead to an erroneous clinical diagnosis or even worst, to blaming the victim thus adding to her distress.

The topics discussed in this section represent salient issues in research with Latinos, particularly, Puerto Ricans. Issues pertaining to traditional gender roles, familial expectations, discrimination and achievement are frequently tied to education.

**Resilience and Education**

Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) reported that their participants spoke highly of only two staff members in their school and identified them as encouraging them through their caring and high expectations. They did not feel the same about the rest of the faculty and staff in their school. Even though we do not know if any of the achieving students in Reis et al. (2005) were Puerto Rican, teachers, administrators, counselors and coaches were key elements in promoting their resilience. It is possible that in Antrop-Gonzalez et al. the students’ perceptions of their positive connection with the Puerto Rican school counselor and the Puerto Rican teacher had something to do with their sharing a common cultural context (Delgado, 1997).

The literature tells us that caring, listening, letting students know that they notice when they are missing, interest in students’ work and personal experiences, and a demonstrated belief in their power to achieve by holding them to high expectations are teacher characteristics that promote academic resilience (Bernard, B., 2004). Positive teacher-student relationships have been recognized as a cornerstone of student success. We have learned from the extant knowledge in the field, that children with membership
in both ethnic minority groups and in poverty have twice the amount of risk factors (Borman & Overman, 2004). We have also learned that ethnic minorities have shown a high risk for depression and for suicidal ideation (Choi et al., 2006). Among the 3 groups in Choi et al., Hispanics had the highest levels of social stress. It is possible that school may be a source of social stress. More often than not, the values and patterns learned at home are ill fitted to the middle class values and patterns that govern our educational institutions (Borman & Overman, 2004; Payne, 2005).

Borman and Overman (2004) studied resilience in mathematics with minority children and suggested that a communitarian model of school organization would be the best school model for promoting resilience. Several features of the model seem very appealing. For example, it is founded on the belief that democracy and an ethic of care are the first indicators of school success. Fitzpatrick (1987) wrote about the breakdown of the Puerto Rican extended family as a risk factor for this population and Payne (2008) submitted that family and community support systems are frequently not there for students who are not achieving in school.

Payne (2008) argued that in order to promote student resilience a change from the present prevalent school organizational model that encourages individualism and competition to one that has a relational learning base is warranted. What Payne described is consistent with the communitarian model that Borman and Overman (2004) suggested for promoting student resilience and which focuses first on the psychosocial adjustment of students.

Borman and Overman (2004) as well as Payne (2005) wrote about the need to teach low SES children the code to successfully function in the classroom and school.
These authors averred that socialization into patterns and values within their family and community environments often create a poor fit for students in school. Bomer et al. (2008) rebutted Payne’s claims on poverty based on their analysis of her book in light of research findings relevant to her teachings on poverty. They addressed her position that teachers should work to help students adopt a formal register of the English language in order to succeed in the worlds of school and work. Bomer et al. stated that this approach assumes that low SES students have deficits and are in need of repair.

Garcia (2001) had posed earlier that traditional school-based efforts to Americanize Hispanic students through the acquisition of English and the rejection of their vernacular carried similar deficit-focused assumptions. Bomer et al. (2008) asserted that teachers’ beliefs inform their practice and expressed a fear that teachers subscribing to Payne’s claims may enter the teacher-student relationship with biases that will limit the learning experiences that they offer within the classroom for minority and low SES children. Regardless of whether or not one agrees with Bomer et al.’s argument or Payne’s, the bottom line is that educators’ beliefs translate into actions within the learning environment. Furthermore, if they play such as significant a role in promoting the development of resilience in children, then learning about how Puerto Rican educators who work with ethnic minorities and children in poverty perceive the meaning of resilience could add useful insights to the extant knowledge in this field of inquiry. If so, then a discussion of the literature on Puerto Rican teachers is of special value to this work.
Resilience and Puerto Rican Educators

Many Puerto Rican educators in the U. S. who work with Second Language Learners (SLLs) were recruited in the decades of the eighties and nineties. An article in the *Curriculum Review* (Author, 1999c) reported that Puerto Rican officials were calling the aggressive recruiting of Puerto Rican teachers by school districts in the U.S. as poaching of English-speaking teachers, their discontent mainly stemming from the fact that at the time there was a campaign pushing for statehood. At the time 80% of the school districts in the mainland expressed the need for bilingual teachers.

Another article’s title read “Need for Bilingual Teachers Depleting Puerto Rico’s Supply.” These recruitment efforts were a cause of concern for the governor of Puerto Rico whose political agenda was to see the Island become the 51st state of the Union, but also, for others worried that this was depleting the educational system’s teaching force (Author, 1999b). School districts vying for bilingual teachers were offering incentives. The article reported that 8 out of 10 school districts in a national survey conducted by the Recruiting New Teachers organization in 1996 cited significant problems finding qualified bilingual teachers in their areas. The issue was one of economics, as teacher salaries in Puerto Rico started at $18,000.00 per year with an average salary of $23,000.00 (Author, 1999a). This article reported that although teachers in Puerto Rico made less money than teachers in the State of Mississippi, the cost of living on the Island was similar to the cost of living in New York City. Salaries offered by U.S. school districts represented almost double that amount (1999b). Puerto Rico’s government’s inability to offer competitive salaries left the system with no mechanisms to fight the egress of bilingual teachers needed to improve English instruction in P. R.
At this point, the reader may be wondering what the purpose of the preceding explanation is and about its relevance to the examination of the literature for this study. The area where this study took place recruited most of the bilingual teachers from the teaching ranks in Puerto Rico. Today, some of those teachers have risen to administrative positions in areas with a heavy enrollment of ethnic minority students, many of whom are Second Language Learners (SLLs) and all are classified as low socioeconomic status (SES) students as indicated by the amount of students who qualified for reduced or free lunch during the school year when this study took place.

It was quite surprising to find such limited information regarding Puerto Rican teachers. Thousands of articles exist on the topic of bilingual education and bilingual issues. The search terms Puerto Rican educator, Puerto Rican teachers, maestros Puertorriqueños, combined with others like resilience and bilingual education yielded very little. I know that many Puerto Rican teachers left the Island during the latter part of the eighties and particularly during the decade of the nineties because I was one of those teachers. How then, can there be such a dearth of studies on Puerto Rican educators in the literature, particularly on the construct of resilience? The element of teacher beliefs about the meaning of resilience needs to be addressed.

Marino-Weissman (2001) examined the beliefs of Latina teachers regarding their language attitudes. She posed that language has been a tool that colonizers throughout history have used to subjugate colonized groups thus disempowering them. Marino-Weisman interviewed four Latina teachers from a district in Southern California. Although not all the teachers were Mexican, none were Puerto Rican. Marino-Weissman seemed to suggest that school environments that succumb to the pressure of disregarding
the connection that exists between a student’s language and his or her cultural identity, employ “mechanisms of language and cultural” (p. 222) domination so prevalent in the politics of colonization. She saw a connection between the minority student achievement gap and the manner in which language acquisition is addressed by the educational system and in the daily practice of teachers who work with SLLs. She asserted that getting bicultural teachers to reflect on their beliefs about bilingualism and examine the critical underpinnings of language in the construction of students’ identity. For this reason Marino-Weisman posed that teachers need to reflect on their own experiences as bilingual, bicultural individuals so that they can become effective models who promote the success of minority students.

Marino-Weisman’s (2001) conclusions seem to be in consonance with research that has found that having a strong sense of cultural identity promotes the academic resilience of Latinos (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2008; Delgado, 1997). Volk (1997) conducted an ethnographical study on activity settings at home and at school of two Puerto Rican kindergarten students who were enrolled in a bilingual class. The teacher, also Puerto Rican, reflecting on her beliefs about SLL students and language acquisition emphasized how important it was to her to ensure that while introducing her students to the English language and to the dominant culture, that she also foster the maintenance of their native language. Volk described her class as engaging and filled with opportunities for students to participate in concrete tasks. She described the atmosphere as one that was welcoming and that encouraged competence through high expectations and helped them build on prior knowledge. Volk concluded that teachers need to enter into a collaborative partnership with parents where teaching and learning are bidirectional. In this manner,
teachers can use language in a complimentary manner by combining daily expressions and formal iterations needed for students to grow and succeed academically in school. Souto-Manning (2006) asserted that teachers who work with children who come from culturally diverse backgrounds need to understand that their function is not to impose formal academic language as the only right one. She posed that different discourses allow children to effectively interact in their personal world and in the world of school.

The classroom observed by Volk exhibited features what Rolón-Dow (2007) highlighted as fundamental for student engagement. This too was ethnography, but it took place in a middle school setting. She interviewed nine Puerto Rican female students, their teachers, and their parents to investigate school engagement as opposed to the concept of passing. She observed that although some of the students in her sample were passing their classes, engagement was low in most of the classrooms. In those where lectures and rote memorization exercises were the order of the day, students who were able to grasp the concepts at the pace of the teacher went about completing the work while feeling bored and disengaged. Students who could not keep up just failed while some of the teachers felt that they were to blame for not paying the required amount of attention. The researcher stated that in some cases the focus of the teacher was on covering the curriculum for the grade while students with gaps in their learning lagged further behind.

Rolón-Dow (2007) made a powerful statement about the critical value that daily experiences in school have in determining minority students’ attitudes toward education. She argued that if teachers are to address the achievement gap of ethnic minority students, they must understand their role in challenging students, providing experiential activities, heeding their cries for help and providing opportunities for ethnic integration.
and for student collaboration. By contrast she told of one of the teachers who brought the curriculum to life for the students by integrating real life events with historical events. This was the only class about which the participants spoke without being prompted. The researcher, who is, incidentally, a Puerto Rican woman asserted that teachers’ assignments speak volumes about their beliefs regarding the ability of minority students to achieve. Her position was that given what we know about the risk factors that low SES minority students face, failing to educate them in a manner that will prepare them to enter and to succeed in institutions of higher learning, is too costly a proposition for Puerto Rican females in particular.

As we have seen, including and encouraging the affirmation of students’ ‘ethnic identity seems to be a common thread among the studies and articles in the field of bilingual education. This study’s theoretical lens is not bilingual education theory; however, factors that have been identified in studies related to the promotion of protective factors in language minorities seem consistent with the discussions that are prevalent in this field. hooks (1994) said teachers cannot empower students through their teaching unless they are “actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being” (p. 15). For a teacher with ethnic minority group membership reflecting on his or her experiences in developing his or her cultural identity is paramount to the self-actualizing process and to said teacher’s sense of self-efficacy in working with ethnic minorities.

Riojas-Clark and Bustos-Flores (2001) avowed the need for pre-service teacher preparation programs to include training that fosters the development and enhancement of teachers’ self-concept and equips them with the strategies to “promote the positive
Como el cantar del coquí (p. 71). They concluded that bilingual pre-service teachers need to enter the classroom prepared to effectively integrate their student’s home culture into the classroom to promote students’ ethnic identity. They posed that if teachers are not clear on their own ethnic identity their self efficacy in helping students affirm their own cultural identities suffers.

Galindo and Olguín (1996) asked the participants in a qualitative study to write autobiographies about their experiences as cultural minorities. The researchers sought to gain insight about the explicit and implicit theories that the teachers held regarding ethnic cultural identity. They concluded that minority teachers bring their experiences of being a minority into their interactions with their students and that they can hinder or enhance their students experiences in school. In light of this, hooks’ (1994) suggestion seems fitting, and Riojas-Clark and Bustos-Flores’ (2001) recommendations sound. Galindo and Olguín seemed to favor a teacher help-thyself-so-that-you-can-help-your-students approach. They employed autobiographies and biographies to help educators reflect on who they were and how the events that shaped their cultural identities manifested in their approach to working with their students.

Puerto Rican teachers, who experienced education in the U.S. during the decades of the sixties and seventies, were inducted into the dominant language without support from their native tongues. Rodriguez (1974) wrote about her own experience as a Puerto Rican child entering the school system in New York City and learning that her language and appearance were wrong. She observed as a child that the children who were quicker to assimilate were judged by the teachers as bright and those who did not, frequently ended up dropping out of school or not learning. Rodriguez raised a point that is akin to
Freire’s (1993) description of how the oppressed sometimes identify with their oppressor and become sub-oppressors of other oppressed people. Rodriguez drew an example of this phenomenon by making reference to how it played out with early groups of immigrants such as the Irish, Jews and Italians. She suggested that some assimilated Puerto Rican teachers expected their students to be initiated into the mainstream culture in the same way they were by members of the earlier immigrant groups.

Rodriguez (1974) cautioned that rejecting student ethnic identity leads to poor student-teacher relations and that those definitely and negatively impact minority student outcomes. Freire (1998) said that “To accept and respect what is different is one of those virtues without which listening cannot take place” (p. 108). Anzaldúa stated, “If you want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity, I am my language” (2004, p. 107). Fiol-Matta (1996), described her experiences in Catholic school as a young Puerto Rican that are similar to the ones described by Rodriguez. She contended that education that prepares students to succeed in mainstream society does not have to come at the cost of alienation from one’s ethnic self. Her reflections on her life as a young student led her to approach her teaching from the perspective that English is a tool and not the redeeming language as it was purported to be. She tailored her curriculum to the needs of her students and took her lessons outside of the classroom in order to bring the curriculum to life for them. Relevance then comes from perspectives that transcend the written word. From these emerge student-generated products that Fiol-Matta believed she would never see otherwise. She said, “I teach as if my students’ survival depended on it. I know that my own does” (p. 74).
Life events like those shared by Fiol-Matta (1996) and Rodriguez (1974) shed light on how these Puerto Rican educators have derived meaning from their experiences as Second Language Learners and how that meaning translates into their philosophies of ethnic identity and second language acquisition. Stories like these abound in the literature, but none speak of the meaning that resilience has for these educators and how that meaning impacts their approach to helping students develop resilience. This study was designed to fill that gap in the literature of resilience research. It employed the use of phenomenology in the qualitative research tradition in search of an understanding of the meaning of resilience of a sample of 12 Puerto Rican educators living in the Midwestern United States.

**Qualitative Phenomenological Research as a Methodology**

Phenomenology is a strategy in the tradition of qualitative research that derives from the philosophy of the same name that was developed by Husserl in the early twentieth century (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2009; Mapp, 2008; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006; Welton, 1999). The hallmark of this method of qualitative inquiry is the search for the understanding of the essence of a phenomenon as seen through the eyes of individuals who have experienced it. In phenomenology, the sample of participants is often small. Participant accounts of their life experiences with the phenomenon are the primary source for data collection. Phenomenology fits the naturalistic research paradigm. Moustakas (1994) posed that “In phenomenology perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (p. 52). He asserted that this strategy requires researchers to silence their own
ideas about the phenomenon so that they can more effectively enter into an understanding of the meaning expressed by the participants. The researcher enters the inquiry with curiosity and wonder and not with an agenda to prove preconceived ideas about the essence of the phenomenon.

One of the methods for collecting data in a qualitative phenomenological study is the use of interviews (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2009; Mapp, 2008; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006; Welton, 1999). Interviews with open-ended questions are an essential feature of phenomenology. When conscientiously done, they can serve to unlock the door to vividly captured human experiences. An effectively conducted interview leads to an understanding of the themes and meanings that emerge from the study participant’s stories. The hallmark of successful interviewing is the ability to create an atmosphere that promotes feelings of trust in the participant-researcher relationship.

Participants agreeing to share their experiences with a researcher are in a vulnerable position. They may withhold information if they mistrust the interviewer. Developing an atmosphere of trust, interviewers can reduce bias in their participants’ responses. Once the data have been collected, and transcribed, the phenomenological researcher carefully and deliberately examines it and looks for patterns and connections that emerge among the salient themes identified to derive conclusions from insights obtained.

This chapter served as a vehicle for the discussion of the construct of resilience in light of the extant literature in the field and the different approaches used in the study of resilience. The waves of resilience gave us a historical background on the construct. I defined resilience based on the articulations of experts in this field of study that I encountered in my review of the literature. This chapter also contained a list of risk and
protective factors most frequently found in the literature. The three models of resilience as described by Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) included in this chapter explained the function of protective factors as intervening elements in an individual’s course toward negative life outcomes.

A discussion of how qualitative and quantitative research methods have been employed and combined to study the construct has offered the reader a panoramic view of the varied foci that the researchers cited here have applied to the study of resilience. I purposely concluded the discussion on the research approaches to the study of resilience with the section on the qualitative research tradition because it was the research perspective used in this study. I believe that it provides a smooth transition into chapter three. Chapter three contains specific information on the method employed in this study and on the phenomenological qualitative research perspective.
CHAPTER III

Research Methodology and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the extant resilience literature by providing an in depth look at what the construct means to educators who are Puerto Rican and how their construction of the meaning of resilience impacts their approach to working with children. The lessons that may be embedded in my findings could help us view the construct of resilience from an additional perspective that does not seem to be present in the current literature on resilience: the Puerto Rican perspective. I hope that ideas for expanding on this research may emerge for others interested in conducting research on resilience. Perhaps hearing my study participants’ voices will encourage scholars to find out more about the meaning of the construct for diverse groups. The more we know, the more the alternatives that might become known to those who may be in most need of overcoming the odds.

I think that I was in a key position to garner in-depth knowledge concerning the meaning that my study participants make of the construct of resilience. The collection of the qualitative data for this study may have been enhanced by the fact that I am an insider, not only in regards to the phenomenon of resilience, but also culturally. I think that being Puerto Rican and fluent in Spanish was an asset to my understanding of what my participants shared with me through our interactions. Nuances that may be otherwise missed by a researcher unfamiliar or even familiar with but outside of the Puerto Rican culture, may not have escaped me, as this is part of the fabric of my being.
**Researcher Bias**

As a responsible researcher, the dangers of being in such close proximity to the topic and population of interest of my study do not go without notice. I know that the same factors that may enhance the compilation of the data could have the potential of introducing bias into its interpretation. A researcher who is as close to the phenomenon being studied as I am must be aware of his or her own biases regarding the construct and the population being studied. To that effect, I have included stories from my personal experience that relate to the construct under study. Ungar (2003) identified this as one of the major contributions of the qualitative research to the field of resilience research because the researcher’s disclosure of his or her personal position and experiences regarding the phenomenon being studied afford the reader a unique glimpse into the bias of the research instrument. In this tradition, the researcher is the main research instrument (Ungar, 2003).

An integral feature of phenomenology is a suspending of one’s own beliefs so that one can enter the data collection task with an open and attentive mind (Creswell, 2009) and doing one’s best to avoid judging the truths that participants articulate as part of their meaning of the phenomenon being studied (Sokolowski, 2006). It is naïve to think that we can achieve a complete separation from our biases when entering into the researcher-participant relationship, nevertheless, being aware of my preconceived notions helped me discern between my personal reality and the truths expressed by my study participants.

Being a professional counselor can have a bipolar effect on how efficiently an individual plays his or her role of researcher. Active listening and paraphrasing are fundamental skills in counseling. These skills proved to be priceless in developing
rapport with the participants and encouraging disclosure. At the opposite pole stands my tendency to employ therapeutic strategies to help the individual because this is what a counselor does. Seidman (2006) warned research interviewers to be cognizant of the distinction between a therapeutic relationship and the role of a researcher who is simply collecting data by means of an interview. Keeping Seidman’s warning in mind helped me avoid this trap.

That the researcher should avoid providing therapy does not mean that one will ignore a participant’s expressed need for help. The researcher may provide the participant with a referral for assistance if extenuating circumstances exist. Opportunities for debriefing can be helpful to individuals who may feel vulnerable after sharing their thoughts with a researcher. Providing informed consent and ensuring that participants know that they are free to withdraw their participation at any time can have an empowering effect for participants (AERA, 2004; Gerrick, 2008).

The section on ethical considerations will give the reader a more in-depth sense of the steps taken to safeguard my participants’ rights within the scope of this study. I will address the limitations of the study later in this work.

**Research Paradigm**

This study followed the qualitative research tradition. Twelve Puerto Rican educators employed in an urban school district in the United States shared their opinions and stories about their experiences with resilience. Creswell (1998) suggested that qualitative researchers using phenomenological methodology ought to interview no fewer than 10 participants. The sample for this study consisted of 12 adult participants who
were asked to describe their experiences at different stages of their personal development and the meaning of resilience that they had constructed from their life journeys.

Ellis (2004) wrote that qualitative methods refer to a variety of research techniques and procedures associated with the goal of trying to understand the complexities of the social world in which we live and how we go about thinking, acting, and making meaning in our lives (p. 25). She went on to say, “These research practices emphasize getting close to those we study, attempting to see the world through participants’ eyes, and conveying the experience in a way faithful to their everyday life” (p. 25).

Attempting to see the world from the participants’ perspectives requires the researcher to suspend his or her presuppositions in order to approach the descriptions of the participants from a non biased and naïve perspective that Husserl, (1927) from his philosophical view of phenomenology, prescribed and identified as Epoche. Epoche is related to bracketing, which is suspending of the researcher’s judgment. This allows the researcher to focus on that which is important, namely, how participants view, experience, and interpret a phenomenon. It is what they view as their reality what takes precedence in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Ellis, 2004; Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002) said that “Qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry” (p. 14). The researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon in this approach.

The expectation for the researcher to avoid manipulating the phenomenon constitutes a fundamental aspect of qualitative design. That is the naturalistic nature of
qualitative inquiry and one of the most salient differences between this type of research
design and true experimental research. With this in mind, I chose to research the
construct of resilience using a psychological phenomenology as the vehicle for arriving at
the answers to my quest.

Moustakas (1994) posed that, “In phenomenology perception is regarded as the
primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (p. 52). Whether we
speak of it as a philosophy (Sokolowski, 2006; Welton, 1999) or as a major qualitative
tradition (Creswell, 1998) and a framework for research methodology (Moustakas, 1994),
phenomenology is an indubitable source of knowledge. Skeptics may pose questions
regarding the validity of this statement. The answer can be found in the purpose and
meaning of phenomenology. That is in simple words, to capture a snapshot of the
meaning of the construct for the participants at a point in time in their lives.

Human experiences with a construct are a lifelong endeavor. Therefore, it is
possible that the participants in this study may at a later point in their lives modify their
stance on how they perceive themselves and their personal resilience journeys based on
new knowledge acquired along the way and thus their understanding of the phenomenon
of resilience may acquire new layers. Times change and people grow and mature. It may
be of significant use to maintain in the periphery of our minds that this study was a
picture of a moment in time in the lives of the study participants.

A photograph taken during the decade of the eighties may reflect the meaning of
beauty that the person or persons in the picture may have subscribed to at the time. A
current picture of the same individual or individuals may give way to new representations
of beauty, but I would argue that the core ingredients, those that make people who they
are, are likely to stand the test of time. I believe that and others may agree (Creswell, 1998, 2009; Moustakas, 1994), that phenomenology provides a glimpse into those core ingredients. The researcher must weed out the superfluous and effectively gather and analyze the data from the study participants lest they squander the opportunity to capture and articulate valuable insights regarding the construct under study. Moustakas clearly explained how a researcher gathers his or her data for phenomenological research. He said that the “Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first person reports of life experiences” (p. 84). Interviews serve this purpose very well as Moustakas himself and others (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Ellis 2004; Seidman, 2006), have stated.

This qualitative research study was conducted in the Midwest of the United States. The research proposal for this study underwent the scrutiny of and was approved by the Human Subjects Review Board whose primary purpose is to ensure the protection of human research participants. The proposed study was of the phenomenological tradition identified by Creswell (1998, 2009) as one of five main traditions in qualitative research design.

Participants

The participants were recruited by purposive convenience sampling. (Creswell, 1998, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007)). Out of a number of 26 possible participants only those approached and who fit the criteria identified as a prerequisite for participation were asked to contribute to the study. Three criteria were used in the sample selection for this study; (a) the individual was born in Puerto Rico or of Puerto Rican parents; (b) the individual was an educator working as a teacher, school counselor or in an administrative
position directly working with students and or involved in decision-making that directly impacted student expectations and or opportunities; and (c) the individual was a self-reported resilient.

Ethnic origin was evidenced by documents such as government or employment related forms, official documents issued by the municipality of birth, church baptismal records and or other legal documents. The baseline data for identifying prospective participants as resilient came from their self-reported experiences with risk factors that have been identified in the resilience literature as posing a danger to and a person’s normative psychosocial development (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1999; Werner & Smith, 2001; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Self-reports were elicited by asking each individual to list factors or events that they believed could have placed them at risk for deleterious life outcomes. Only participants whose responses reflected the presence of four or more risk factors and or negative disruptive life events were selected for participation. This is consistent with prior practice in the field of resilience research. Masten (2001) suggested that for resilience to occur an individual must have experienced at least 4 risk factors or threats to their normative psychosocial development. Of that group, the individuals selected as study participants were those with the highest incidence of factors or life events that have been identified in the resilience literature as likely to have deleterious effects on individuals’ life outcomes. A list of risk factors identified by some scholars in the resilience literature can be found in chapter 2 of this dissertation under the section on risk and protective factors. (See Table 1.)

It is relevant to note that the primary goal of this study is not the generalization of the findings to other populations. The sections discussing the data contain extensive
Descriptions which will allow the reader to determine whether or not, and at what point in time the findings of this study can be transferred to another group. Ungar (2003) highlighted the latter as one of the major contributions of the qualitative research tradition to the field of resilience research. Another major contribution that Ungar cited was that qualitative methods allow for the amplification of the voices of marginalized groups in a manner that provides the reader the opportunity to access interpretations that may differ from the popular discourse of the dominant group. Again, this study sought to uncover what the phenomenon of resilience meant to the participants. The reader is free to draw his or her own conclusions based on the evidence presented for the themes discussed.

The sample size for this study consisted of 12 participants who were Puerto Rican urban educators. The 12 participants worked in an urban school district and most were classroom teachers. Three Puerto Rican males and nine Puerto Rican females composed the sample. They ranged between 26 and 65 years of age at the time of the study. Participants who chose to do so collaborated in the selection of pseudonyms meant to protect their privacy. Additionally, pseudonyms were assigned to others outside of the study when having to mention a third party’s name as part of the narrative or embedded in participants’ quotes.

The questions driving this research were the following:

1. What does resilience mean to Puerto Rican educators who have overcome adversity?
2. What beliefs or theories of resilience have they constructed out of their experiences?
3. How do those beliefs and theories seem manifest in their approach to helping students develop skills to prevail over adversity?

**Ethical Considerations**

The proposal for this study successfully underwent the scrutiny of Ashland University’s Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). The HSRB is an oversight body charged with the task of reviewing proposals for research studies submitted by faculty and students to assure that compliance with federal regulations regarding the involvement or use of human beings as research subjects or participants has been met. Federal regulations mandate specific steps in ensuring that the ethical principles of autonomy; justice and beneficence are the cornerstones of an investigator’s research protocol. To that effect, a researcher must reflect on the risks that may come to his or her study participants as a result of their participation in their research (Gerrick, 2008).

Investigators must take steps to protect their study participants from incurring physical, social or psychological harm by designing a research protocol that first takes into account the wellbeing of the study participants. Confidential handlings of raw data, protecting the participants’ identities in the research report and obtaining informed consent from each of them, became important steps in protecting the rights of the human beings participating in this study. Another feature of this study was the respectful treatment of the participants as recommended in the American Educational Research Association’s (AERA, 2004) ethical guidelines regarding risk and harm to human subjects (AERA, 2004). I informed participants of their right to withdraw from participation in this study at any time, provided them with personal contact information...
as well as contact information for the university’s HSRB should they have additional questions or comments. I provided the participants with a detailed list of the procedures and expectations for participation in the study, and discussed possible risks and benefits that could come to them as a result of their participation in this research project (See Appendix A for consent forms.)

I explained to the participants that taking part in this study was not expected to yield direct benefits to them other than the opportunity to gain a more in-depth understanding on the construct of resilience in light of their own experiences. Another possible benefit discussed was that their participation in this study may give way to the exploration of how their experiences with the phenomenon may or may not manifest in their interactions with students. Insights inspired by their participation in the study could benefit them in their daily practice as educators, as well as the people with whom they work each day. Additionally, telling their stories of triumph over adversity during our interviews may serve to further empower the participants. Their stories, contained in this study, may serve to inspire other educators to reframe their perceptions on the role of educators in helping students develop resilience. Each participant articulated his or her understanding of the research protocol and signed the informed consent form. They each received a copy of the informed consent form, which I also explained verbally.

**Data Collection Methods**

In late February of 2010 I began informally asking a few Puerto Rican educators in the selected urban school district if they would be interested in participating in the study for my doctoral dissertation. I told them that I was in the process of completing the
proposal approval process and that all I could say at that time was that it would be a study of Puerto Rican educators’ experiences in overcoming adversity. I shared what I was proposing as the title for the study and received encouraging comments regarding different individuals’ interest and willingness to learn more or to participate in the project. I promised that I would contact them as soon as I received permission from my doctoral dissertation committee and Ashland University’s HSRB to proceed with my study. Soon a snowball effect took place, and I began receiving calls with referrals concerning other Puerto Rican educators in the area who might be interested in participating in my study.

March of 2010 came in as a lion not due to the weather; but because it marked the initiation of the data collection process for this study while every district in the state was feeling the rumble and the roar of the impending standardized tests that loomed near. The participants in this study not only offered the gift of their time and attention to listen to the purpose, procedures and expectations for the study; they allowed me as a researcher to be privy to their thoughts about resilience and to painful as well as joyous experiences in their life’s journeys.

Upon obtaining informed consent from each participant, I asked them to fill out a participant profile sheet with basic data regarding contact information, place of birth, length of time living in the U.S. and their age range. The profile sheet also contained a consolidated list of the risk factors listed on Table 1 in Chapter 2 of this work. I asked each one to circle the factors or life experiences that they may have lived through and left space for them to list any additional ones which they considered important. All participants identified 4 or more of the risk factors listed on the sheet. In this manner
selection of the sample was completed and the data collection process began. At that time I gave each participant a disposable 35 mm photographic camera to capture images of things, places, or people, past or present that in some way represented adversities overcome and others symbolizing their meaning of resilience. I collected the cameras during the first interview and had the film converted into photograph files on compact disk upon receipt. I then downloaded the images into the computer to use as prompts for the second and final interviews.

The primary data for this study were interviews. Interviews with open-ended questions are an essential feature of phenomenology. The primary data were collected through three interviews with each participant. Seidman (2006) recommended this number as a minimum for phenomenological interviewing. (A copy of the interview protocols can be found in Appendix B of this dissertation.) Secondary data were collected for triangulation purposes. Data were triangulated utilizing documents and opportunistic observations of the participants for purposes of corroborating the data. Informal observations, and documents shared by each participant as well as artifacts, photographs, notes and letters were used for the triangulation of data (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002).

**Interviews**

I met individually with each study candidate and explained my research proposal at length. I included my business as well as my mobile telephone numbers on the forms so that the participants could reach me at any time if they had questions about any aspect of the study. Each participant indicated that he or she understood the purpose and procedures proposed for the study. All participants returned the signed consent forms. I then proceeded to schedule the first interview with each participant.
Two face to face interviews lasted for a period of approximately 90 minutes and were audio and video taped. The third interview was conducted by electronic mail using open ended questions posted on SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) for the collection of responses accessed through the link for this study individually e-mailed to each participant. SurveyMonkey is an online research tool available free of charge with an option for more sophisticated research tools available for a fee. The interviews with each participant followed the 3 interview paradigm discussed by Seidman (2006) as closely as possible and the interview question format was “open ended, evolving and non-directional” (Creswell, 1998, p. 99) in a deliberate attempt to make them prompts that would elicit detailed stories from the participants. (See Appendix B for the interview protocols.)

The first interview focused on the participants’ experiences with resilience from early childhood to young adulthood. The second interview served to clarify points from the first and then delve into the participants’ experiences with resilience as adults and into the present. Finally, the third interview focused on the participants’ stories illustrating how or if their personal meaning of resilience transcended the personal and manifested in their practice. Most of the interviews took place outside of the participants’ place of work. Of the 24 face to face interviews conducted, five took place before or after hours at the location of the participants’ workplace and 13 interviews were completed at the home of the participants. I conducted both face to face interviews with one of the participants in a conference room of a public library with the remainder of the face to face interviews having taken place in my home at the request of those participants for a total of 24 face to face interviews. All person to person interviews took place after or before school hours or
Como el cantar del coquí

During holidays or weekends. The third interview was conducted as described earlier with 100% participation of the sample.

Although it is possible that issues of power may have been present for the participants who chose to interview in my home, these educators expressed feeling very relaxed during the interview process. I took several precautions in order to try as much as possible to even the playing field in terms of the power dynamics. Within my home, I offered each participant her choice of any one of five rooms where we could conduct the interviews. All of those who interviewed at my house were females. The rooms offered as interview areas were a guest room, living room, family room, breakfast area, and the dining room. One of the interviews took place in my living room and the remaining three of the four, in my family room.

I deliberately refrained from offering my home office as a venue for conducting interviews. Doing so may have implied issues of power that could have interfered with the participants’ ability to relax and openly share their stories and thus negatively impact the data collection process. Additionally, as in all other interviews, whenever possible I sat either at eye level or lower in relation to the individual. The latter was in efforts to send the message that I did not hold a place of more importance than they in the interviewer-interviewee relationship. I believe that my precautions served to ameliorate the interference with the collection of data that conducting the interviews at home may have posed. I witnessed several cathartic moments that I believe would not have manifested if the women had not felt comfortable sharing their stories due to them being in my territory instead of theirs.
Observations

Opportunistic observations took place during the interviews and during the times immediately before or after the interviews. Some observations took place at the participants’ workplace while I set up interview paraphernalia and or waited for an appointment to commence. I informally observed all but one of the participants in their respective places of work. I have included observations of particular interest to this study in the section on teaching.

Review of documents and Products

The participants shared documents that they valued as related either to their triumphs or to their struggles. Documents shared ran the gamut from photographs, birth certificates, licenses, and diplomas, to personal letters, notes, drawings, and divorce decrees. In addition to photographs from their personal collections, I gave the participants disposable cameras and asked them to take pictures of people, places, artifacts and other things that represented in some way what resilience means to them. I developed the film and asked the participants to elaborate on the meaning of resilience that their chosen images represented. Some of the participants chose to take digital photographs instead of using the camera provided. One of the participants constructed a PowerPoint presentation for the sole purpose of this study. Another created a digital file containing not only pictures, but also poems that struck a chord for him in regards to the construct of resilience. All digital files and photographs were printed and compiled with the interview data collected.
Data Analysis Procedures

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded according to emergent themes. Each interview underwent three codings conducted by this researcher. I asked my study participants to corroborate the identified themes in an effort to reduce researcher interpretation bias and to give the participants the opportunity for further input on how their stories would be understood. I gave the participants who chose to interview in Spanish the opportunity to check the translations of their quotes to ensure that the meaning of their words remained unadulterated.

I coded all interview transcripts, observation notes, documents and field notes. I compiled a table with the most prevalent themes based on their frequency. An initial number of 1,153 themes emerged from the data. Overlapping themes consolidated into a more manageable number of topics. One hundred and thirty-six topics led to a further amalgamation of themes. These were divided into 3 major areas for discussion.

- Environmental Influences: Under Three of the “Five Suns” (Piirto, 2002a)
- Personal Attributes: “Their Essence”: Resiliencies (Wolin & Wolin, 1993)
- Encouraging Resilience: Educator’s Role

The three general topics of discussion listed above correspond to the themes with the highest frequency across participants, organized using the theoretical framework provided by the Piirto Pyramid of Talent Development (Piirto, 2002a) specifically three of her “Five Environmental Suns” and Wolin and Wolin’s (1993) Seven Resiliencies. (See Appendix C for the Piirto Pyramid of Talent Development.) These created the outline for the organization of chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation. Piirto’s model of
talent development better known as her Pyramid of Talent Development offers a logical theoretical context for the discussion of the salient themes found in this study. Under the classification of Piirto’s “Five Environmental Suns,” we will take a look at the influences in the lives of the study participants in the areas of home, school, community and culture. These comprise what Piirto identified as “the three major suns.” I have selected this framework as a good fit with the data to be discussed because it covers areas identified in the literature as relevant to the development of resilience (Garmezy, 1993; Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Werner & Smith; 1992). Piirto’s theory of talent development suggests a constructionist approach such as the one favored by Ungar (2004a) who asserted that the influence of culture cannot be taken out of the resilience equation if we aim to gain a more comprehensive and less biased understanding of the phenomenon.

I have departed from Wolin and Wolin’s “Seven Resiliencies” framework to discuss the personal attributes common among the participants in this study because during the coding process, their themes kept resounding in my mind. After organizing the recurring topics as suggested by the data, I found a good fit for them under the rubric of Wolin and Wolin’s Seven Resiliencies. Nevertheless, I have selected alternate terms that I believe to be more descriptive of the significant themes in this study. The third area of discussion relates to the question of how the participants’ experiences have informed their approach in trying to help students develop or find their resilient selves.

Arriving at the decision of how to present the data in a cogent manner required revisiting the participants’ statements and other materials over and over until arriving at what I think is the extract of what the data represent. In this fashion, a more in depth analysis of the participants’ statements led to a further amalgamation of themes.
Moustakas (1994) described this process for organizing and analyzing qualitative data. This method of analysis produced a final number of 11 main units (Creswell, 2009). Although smaller in size, this group of themes yielded a rich source for the description of the essence of the phenomenon of resilience as experienced by the study participants.

Textural and structural descriptions materialized out of the themes uncovered through the steps of this data analysis. From the marriage of texture and structure the essence of what resilience means for this study’s participants came to light. The reader is cordially invited into the next chapter where rich descriptions from the voices of twelve educators of the Puerto Rican Diaspora share what resilience means to them.
CHAPTER IV

Study Findings and Discussion of Environmental Factors

Como el cantar del coquí: Beginnings

It is late March and I head out to conduct the first interview for my study. The first appointment’s date seemed like nothing more than the mark of the beginning of a unique learning experience. Time: friend and foe. As it passes by, wounds heal sometimes leaving barely noticeable scars, distant memories of hurts. It runs ahead in the blink of an eye leaving one immersed in feelings of bewilderment amid the dusty remnants of its passage. Later, as I begin to transcribe the first interview, I notice that it took place on the anniversary of my mother’s death. I stop and think about her and think that somehow she is watching over me and her nod of approval sensed by my soul bids me out of this maudlin interlude and pushes me full force into the task at hand. Thus began a quest for data that took four months to complete.

One day, you realize that there you are alone with your data, experiencing a kind of intimacy most likely known only by those who have engaged in this type of a venture. The researcher relives every minute through the recordings, then the transcripts, the pictures, and other documents that compose this arsenal of information. Sometimes you laugh out loud; at other times you hold your breath hoping that you had enough sense to ask the right question next. Sometimes a grunt at the fear that an alternatively posed question may have elicited a more powerful response rises up in your chest, a reminder that you are only an apprentice cautiously stepping in the footprints left by those who have mastered the craft.
I stop coding for a minute. Why am I in tears? What is this anguish that has crept up in me? The solitude of my home office, the company of my puppies, binders with transcripts of my interviews and a personal DVD player provide the perfect conditions for my vulnerability to take form and I dare step into the world of emotions conveyed by my study participants. They have given me such a gift in their willingness to walk me through the paths that have brought them to where they are. Their stories, gifts wrapped in a variety of hues and textures, have left me with the task of unwrapping and uncovering the meaning concealed in their narratives. With tears in my eyes and a constricted throat I pray that God grants me the wisdom to analyze the data. I imagine myself as an artist working to skillfully convey the picture that the participants in this study have shown me.

As I begin writing the final chapters of this dissertation, I sit in my work room, a far cry from the place where I first engaged in scholarly tasks as a child. A compelling sense of gratitude envelopes me as it is certain as the sun that my life has been touched by angels.

Earlier in this work I committed to let the voices of my participants tell their stories and in doing so uncover what resilience means to them. For this reason, the reader will find quotes embedded throughout the discussion of findings as their words are powerful merchants of a confetti of illustrations that do not require reconstruction in the words of the researcher. The relevant quotes are there for the reader to access without having to travel away from the discussion of findings. Those who may see this style as distracting may skip the quotes and just read my descriptions. Notwithstanding, I hope that you will resist the urge to skip over their words and choose to stop and listen to their
Como el cantar del coquí

voices. Appendix D contains a chart listing the 12 participants and their descriptions. I hope that it may serve as a point of reference for ease of remembering who they are as you encounter them on our journey through the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

**Themes under the Three Major “Suns”**

Piirto (2002a) noted that we are all influenced by what she called the “five environmental suns.” She pointed out that there are three major “suns.” The first of the three, “the sun of home” represents the influences of the person’s home environment. This sun’s brightness depends on the measure of positiveness and nurturing existent in the home environment in which the individual was raised. The second of the three major “suns” is the “sun of community and culture.” The intensity of light projected by this “sun” is determined by the level of compatibility between the educational values conveyed in this environment and the support that it provides for the person’s educational institution and home. Piirto especially highlighted the importance of the third “major sun: the sun of school.” What makes the sun of school particularly powerful is its power to compensate for the other “suns” when their light is obscured by less than desirable conditions in their respective realms.

It bears mentioning that although the participants made many references to the concept of machismo, for the purposes of this study gender differences in relation to the construct of resilience will be addressed under the “sun of community and culture.” Because the salient themes identified in the data fall under the classification of Piirto’s “three major suns,” the discussion regarding the ecological influences or environmental
factors in the lives of the participants will center on those. I have listed these themes in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The “Three Major Suns”</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun of Home</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong Mothers, Absent Fathers and Domestic Hurdles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Extended Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun of Community and Culture</td>
<td>Community Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Machismo and Marianismo</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cultural Pride and Race</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language: “I am my accent.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun of School</td>
<td>Clouds of Rejection and Rays of Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Value of Education</td>
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I submit, based on the meaning of resilience collectively expressed by the participants in this study that resilience results from the interaction of the individual’s
personal attributes and his or her environment. Talents which reside in the individual and that may be promotive of resilience manifest despite adverse conditions and thus allow the resilient self to thrive in the presence of adversity (Garmezy, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992). Some of the beliefs expressed by the participants on this matter point to the question of nature versus nurture. Most of them expressed the belief that resilience can be learned or developed. For example, Francis said, “You know resilient people find their inner strength.” Ricardo believed that both nature and nurture played a part in the development of his resilience. He said, “People are born with it, but some of it can be learned.” Emma said that, “It’s an inner strength that you have and that you may have gotten that from your parents.”

Some of the participants seemed to ponder the idea of resilience as an ability that may have something to do with their genetic inheritance. However, this ought not to be mistaken with an assertion about resilience as an innate trait. For example, further statements from Emma defined what she meant by the statement regarding getting one’s resilience from one’s parents. She, as well as others, identified one or both parents as role models of resilience and strength, suggesting that resilience can be learned by observation. The participants in this study spoke of characteristics that reveal a person as resilient. Some of those characteristics are the ones that they sometimes seemed to view as a family trait. Resilience, according to the participants in this study, relies greatly on the lessons derived from their parents’ or other significant adults’ approach to dealing with adversity, lessons residing in an individual’s environment. Emma went on to say about her parents, “Let’s say like accomplishing things that maybe through their difficulties, though they had them, seeing that success. . .” Carolina expressed that
resilience comes, “Basically out of that foundation you have, you’ve seen within your immediate family that resilience, and you don’t understand it at first, but that’s basically what you do later on. You just function based on what you have seen.” These quotes provide a perfect entrance into the realm of the “sun of home.”

**The “Sun of Home”**

Ah, the “sun of home.” That place where we hang our proverbial hats. Home: the space in the world from where our dreams depart, our treasures hide, and our secrets lurk. Home is where we expect our first experiences with love and attachment to take place. For many, it represents the place where our first experience with religion occurs. For the participants in this study, the places they called home were varied and yet common themes arose from their stories of home. I invite the reader to come with me. Let us tiptoe into these secret, sacred, scary and sometimes even splendid places in the lives of this study’s participants.

**Religion.** The theme of religion made a stellar appearance in the participants’ descriptions of home. This seems of particular interest as later on we will see that spirituality was a salient theme as a factor the participants identified as promotive of their resilience. This theme is also connected to the “sun of culture” as we would expect based on what scholars have written about the relationship between religion, family and culture in Puerto Rico (Rondón, 2003; Stycos, 1952). For the participants in this study religious practices and beliefs started at home. Although some had parents who did not attend church regularly, most taught their children the principles of Catholicism a practice that for most of the families was a generational tradition. A tradition that as Rondón (2003)
posed stems from the colonial era of the 19th century whose influences are still felt in Latinos today.

Claudia was raised by her grandparents who had raised her mother before her to be a devout Catholic. She said about her mother that, “Los primeros ocho años de su educación se crió en un convento católico donde tomó su educación. A ella le encanta rezar, levantarse por la mañana y rezar . . .” [“The first eight years of her life, she was raised in a Catholic convent where she got her education. She loves to pray, rise in the morning and pray.”] Claudia’s grandmother, who became her adoptive mom, made sure that Claudia and her brothers learned about faith and the doctrines of the Catholic religion even though they were not regular church attendees. Claudia and her brothers lived next door to a convent where they spent time after school with the nuns learning about the fundamentals of the Catholic faith. The priest frequently visited the family’s home. She said, “Nosotros conocimos la fé cristiana y siempre nos manteníamos en que era importante creer en algo. [We learned about the Christian faith and we always maintained that it is important to believe in something.]” Claudia’s grandmother, a devotee of Our Lady of Miracles, one of the many names given to Mary in the Catholic tradition. This faith made the burden of any worries seem lighter. She and her brothers were taught to have faith “y a pedir a ese Dios todopoderoso [And to ask the almighty God]” for help with whatever problems they were facing.

Ricardo recalled visiting his grandmother and the daily ritual of praying the rosary. His grandmother was very religious, and as a young boy he would frequently stay at her house. Every evening at eight Ricardo’s grandmother would blow out the candles that served as the homes lighting “and it was time to sit down and pray.” She would recite
the complete rosary. Bead after bead, prayer after prayer from Ricardo’s words I gathered that time just seemed to stand still for the young boy who together with the rest of the children had to kneel next to his grandmother and recite the prayers whether they really knew them or not.

Ricardo’s grandmother did not attend church frequently but she observed Catholic religious practices such as reciting the daily rosary and expected her family to do the same. Ricardo did not particularly enjoy this activity in his youth but followed suit out of respect and love for his grandmother. He would say to his cousins, “If I’ve got to sit here and suffer and just listen to her do the rosary, you’re going to stay here with me.” Ricardo reflected on those times during our interviews and found that what seemed like a burden to him during his childhood, stood out as a treasured memory of times spent with his grandmother.

Julia said, “Sometimes religion was a source of conflict within the family.” When she was a child her mother was Catholic. As a result of her mother’s religious affiliation, by the time she was an adolescent Julia had completed all the sacraments expected for her age. She said, “You have to do your first communion and whatever comes with it.” Julia was older when her big sister convinced her and her mother to convert to a different religion. They joined a Presbyterian church. Julia felt rejected by her Catholic family members. She said, “When you change from one religion to another, it’s like your own family says, ‘Oh, they’re not Catholic anymore? Oh, forget it. They have another belief.’ It’s like they reject you.” Julia could not understand why the sudden loss of support just because they adopted a new set of religious beliefs. “So there’s another type of adversity right there. It doesn’t matter what religion you are, I’m still the same.”
Como el cantar del coquí 119

Elisa recall ed when her parents converted to a Protestant religion and tried to force her to follow the doctrines of their newly adopted beliefs. She identified that as a difficult time in her adolescence because it came with the rejection of the identity that she had developed under her Catholic beliefs. She said, “Yo tenía muchas libertades dentro de esa religión y se metieron a ser evangélicos y querían imponerme una religión y doctrinas que yo no aceptaba so fueron momentos difíciles.” [“I had many liberties within that religion and they became evangelical and they wanted to impose a religion and doctrines that I didn’t accept, so those were difficult moments.”] Elisa’s parents would force her to attend church on Sundays and she obliged as that was the only choice offered.

Religious expectations included rules about apparel, and these rules, as we saw in Elisa’s case, sometimes created tension between parents and children. Elisa loved wearing jewelry and pants, both of which are acceptable for Catholics but not for some Protestants. Her parents went as far as chasing her around the yard to yank a gold chain off her neck. Carmen also recounted a time she got in trouble with her mother for showing up to church in the wrong attire. She said, “Then, I went to church with jeans and my mom had a heart attack [Gasp!] Catholic. ‘With jeans? Oh! What you’re doing!’ She didn’t let me go in.” Francis, a male was also expected to conform to the attire deemed acceptable in his church and to his father. He told me of a Good Friday when his father would not let him sit by him and his mother because of a pair of jeans that he chose to wear on that day.

It was Good Friday. Francis’s family was eager to get to church where “Ten Spanish Baptist churches are involved to go listen to the last seven words of Christ.”
Suddenly, his father looked down and saw that Francis was wearing a pair of bell-bottom jeans. “I am telling you these were the most conservative things that I could’ve ever bought and they were black. Do you know that my father said to me, ‘Don’t walk with me. You are not my son.’” The father proceeded to scold Francis’s mother, “That is not my son. You’re the one that’s always indulging him to put on those things. I cannot believe that!” They arrived at the service, and once inside the church and among a multitude of 900 people, “I am not sitting with my parents. I was not allowed.”

But the story did not end there. At the end of the service, Francis heard the minister say, “Before the benediction I would like Brother Francis to lead us and to dismiss us in prayer.” Francis’s father began to stand up thinking that the minister had singled him out for what he considered an honor. He froze on the spot when the minister clarified that he was addressing “Francis Jr.” and not his dad. Francis said, “I guess it was one of those moments” when you feel everyone’s eyes on you. He added, “Then there was this rush of adults towards my parents, ‘How proud you must be. How your son, oh my God, where did he get those words? Oh my God, I feel so lifted.’” Francis’s father proudly thanked everyone for their compliments. Francis told of his feeling of vindication when out of the multitude the minister chose him to dismiss the crowd in prayer. Francis seemed to feel that he had won a small battle not only for him but for other young men in the church.

Francis remembered the boys in the congregation running to their parents citing him as an example to gain approval for wearing similar pants. Francis’s father walked out of church that day feeling very proud of his son and although apologies were never made, Francis did not express bitterness in his retelling of this episode in his life. On the
contrary, he exuded satisfaction as he revisited that place in time when his father beamed with pride as a result of something he did and when he won a small battle. He said, “So I guess the ride home was not too uncomfortable.” This is important to note as we will see later that two salient personal attributes common to the participants in this study were their sense of humor and their ability to choose to maintain a positive perspective even in difficult situations.

Marlena’s parents switched religions when she was in her late teens and still, at the time of this study would try to convince her to adopt their beliefs, but her beliefs were deeply rooted in the Catholic religion. Marlena’s family attended church “every Sunday” when she was a child. She was baptized in the Catholic Church as a baby. There she made her first communion and was confirmed in the faith. She said, “We were very Catholic. We couldn’t miss church.”

She was emphatic about the religious practices that she was so familiar with when she was a child. She said, “We were very Catholic. Very. [Emphasis added.]” Back then she remembered having to cover her head with a “mantilla [veil]” in order to enter the church edifice. At the time of this study Marlena still kept her mother’s old veil as a cherished memento of her religious foundation and the lessons of faith modeled by her mother. She said, “I still have what my mom used to put on her head. You couldn’t go to church with your head uncovered.” She spoke of the mantilla, lighting candles, and of the apparel known as habits. Habits represented payment of a sacrifice promised to a saint for the award of a miracle or positive response to a prayer. “If someone died, they did rosarios [rosaries]. And I remember her wearing this suit, like a dress. It was like a promise.” Marlena grew accustomed to these practices and teachings beginning as far as
she could remember. She said, “And they would tell us you always pray and ask God for
guidance, and my grandma too would tell us. But then my mom and dad changed
religion.”

Suddenly, the practices that she had grown accustomed to and that were
acceptable in her parents’ eyes became the very thing that they spoke against. Marlena
said that after her parents converted to Protestantism they tried to convince her that she
should not pray to the Virgin Mary because, “Esa es la madre de Dios [That is the mother
of God.]. Before you used to pray to the Virgin Mary for Jesus. Now you know you don’t
have to. You just pray directly to God.” Marlena’s parents also became critical of her
choice of any religious artifacts depicting saints. She said, “She doesn’t believe in that, so
she tells us we shouldn’t have them, to just believe in God. The rosary is another thing.”
Marlena’s mother was also against her praying the rosary. Marlena however, remained
faithful to her Catholic beliefs. Although she was not a regular church goer she self
identified as Catholic maintaining that, “I mean I still believe in the Catholic religion
more than the one she [her mother] believes in, because that’s what we were raised in,
and she changed after we were growing up.”

Emma was another participant who vividly recalled the role that religion played in
her family, specifically Catholicism. Although she did not experience it all first hand, her
grandfather and father frequently told her and her sister stories about the practice of
reciting the daily rosary. The respect afforded to parents and grandparents seemed to be
intertwined with the religious expectations for the offspring regardless of age or gender.
Emma told me that her uncles even when they were in their twenties would heed the call
of her grandfather. All he had to do was whistle and his sons “wherever they were at 7:00
at night they’d drop everything because that was the time to get together and say the rosary.”

There were times when religion became a liberating force for a family struggling with domestic violence. This was the case for Francis. Francis credited religion, for the change in his father’s behavior. Earlier in his life Francis vividly recalled having been terribly frightened by his father’s angry outbursts, a little boy so frightened that he once felt that fear with such intensity that his small body physically reacted by losing control of his bowels. Francis’s father finding religion seemed to bring forth a slice of the domestic peace that the family longed for. He said,

Spirituality really played a very big part because then my father does a very deep, deep, deep soul search, a definite wanting to change his anger, you know whatever he was angry at, and he channels that anger and that energy into his love for his church, his love for God, his love for the brethren and their fellowship, and he finds a release from his “dreams deferred,” like Langston Hughes.

Although his father was still prone to a quick temper after he converted to the Baptist religion, never again did Francis have to experience domestic turmoil at the level that he had at one time as a result of his dad’s expressions of anger.

As we have seen, religion seemed to be an integral component in the family dynamics of the participants. Family dysfunction did not preclude parents from instilling religious values in most of the participants. Dalia said, “Even with the dysfunctional type of home we had, church was important.” It is very difficult to separate religion from the family because of the interconnection of the two suggested by the data. Garmezy (1993) and Werner and Smith (1992) listed three major factors that they found to be promotive
of resilience. Two of those factors seem to relate to the theme of religion in this study. The first, characteristics of the nuclear family, seems relevant because it was the nuclear family that instilled and enforced religious practices in the lives of the participants. The second, the extra-familial characteristics, relates to the community and the support available there for the families. Although not all were frequent church attendees, many did participate in religious activities and the presence of the clergy was a common occurrence in some of the households. There seemed to be a symbiotic relationship of sorts between the nuclear family and the church. The family enforced the church’s teachings and the church taught deferment to parental authority. How then does a person make sense of chaos at home when they have been taught not to question parental authority, yet every fiber of their being seems to signal that something is wrong? Dealing with this dilemma requires insight or intuition as I prefer to call it and that is one of the themes that emerged from the data, but before we can delve into that one, we need to take a snapshot of what the participants’ home life was like. Let us look at the themes that emerged regarding the family itself.

**Strong mothers, absent fathers and domestic hurdles.** In 2003, Rondón stated that the legacy of Spanish-Catholic colonization had reached out from the 19th century well into the 21st, to terrorize women. On that occasion he was speaking out on the concept of Marianismo discussed in the literature review chapter of this study. Stycos (1952) had said earlier that Puerto Rican women were expected to be the primary caregivers and seemed to be largely responsible for setting the rules for the daily routines at home. On the other hand, the same religious principles that seemed to work so well to
condition the children to be respectful and obedient to their elders, also affirmed, albeit covertly, the belief that women were inferior to men (Fitzpatrick, 1987; Suárez-Findlay, 1999; Stycos, 1952). Most of the mothers in this sample were not the exception to this rule. The majority of them survived very difficult situations. Bear in mind that only 42% of the mothers had graduated high school and out of those only two had obtained a degree beyond two years of college. Some of the moms had made it only as far as the elementary school level with one of them completing only a second grade level.

Because of limited resources and options many had no other choice than to try to tolerate their husbands’ behaviors and make the best of their situations. Claudia was raised by her grandparents after her paternal grandfather and uncle stepped in, and her mother in an effort to rescue them from the danger posed by their father relinquished her guardianship of Claudia and her two siblings to them. She claimed that her mother wanted to be a nurse, but because females in her family were not allowed to go away to college, her mom could not pursue her dream. During that time, nursing programs were only offered in San Juan, which was hours away from Claudia’s town. Later on Claudia’s mother migrated to the U.S. under the tutelage of her uncle and with the intent of escaping what Claudia called her mother’s “prisión [prison].” It was during that time when she met Claudia’s father and married him to escape again from the dominance of her uncle who had very efficiently adopted the role of dictating her every move.

The relationship was doomed from the start, as Claudia’s father had been orphaned at a young age, had been a runaway at age 12, and by the time he married her mother at age 17, had two children from a previous relationship with an older woman. Claudia’s dad was addicted to drugs, and he terrorized her mother. Claudia said that her
mother even at the time of this study, and after more than five decades since the relationship ended, suffered a sort of post traumatic stress every time she found herself in close proximity to Claudia’s father. She said, “Mi mamá, como él tenía vicio de drogas y aveces pues este maltrataba físicamente, mentalmente a mi mamá. El la encerraba, le daba. Aveces si estaba manejando él iba a una velocidad muy fuerte. [My mom, because he was addicted to drugs and sometimes, well, he would abuse her physically and mentally. He would lock her in, he would hit her. Sometimes if he was driving he would go at a very high speed.]” On one occasion Claudia's aunt and her mother jumped out of the car while in motion in order to escape the danger posed by his reckless driving while under the influence of drugs. On another occasion Claudia’s father stabbed her mother on the knee with a steak knife. “Mi mamá todavía tiene las marcas. Ella vivió una vida muy sufrida. [My mom still has the marks. She lived an insufferable life.]”

Claudia was three months old when her uncle and grandfather took her to Puerto Rico and away from her biological parents. She did not see her mother again until she was about 4 years old. She did not see her father again until age 12, when she visited the state where he was residing. She missed her mother and having a father. Notwithstanding, she found in her grandparents fine substitutes for her absent parents. She reported that her grandparents were the ones who influenced her the most. She called them mom and dad. Claudia, however, remembers growing up with the fear that they might die and the uncertainty of what would happen then. She remembers getting ready for prom and overhearing a conversation between her grandparents where her grandfather expressed concern about what would become of his wife if he were to pass away first. Claudia recalled that day as the saddest one in her adolescent life.
Ricardo, one of 13 siblings, remembered his father walking out on the family as he stated, “when we needed him the most.” His mother then took on the role of mother and father for her large family, and the children were expected to help. At the time Ricardo’s father “abandoned” the family there were ten of the thirteen children still living at home. Ricardo said, “That was a tough time. Now lucky for us, my mother was able to keep the family together and she was able to keep us going.” Ricardo’s family had to make readjustments in a hurry. He further described a system whereby the children took on the responsibility for different chores according to their ages. For example, some cared for the younger siblings, and others cooked and cleaned. “All that while my mother was working. So the fact that she had that support at home helped her keep the family together.”

Ricardo believed that his resilience was largely influenced by the experience of being part of a family that refused to fall apart after his father broke up with his mother. He asserted that some people are not fortunate enough to have a cohesive family that refuses to succumb to negative circumstances. He said, “Not everyone has that, so I guess that’s one of the things that kind of helped me out.” He described his mother as a strong woman who was able to work synergistically with her children to make it through her husband’s heartbreaking and financially damaging departure.

Francis’s poignant description of his mother looking out for him from a window in the projects provides a picture of the mother’s watchful eye, whose protection and caring we can sense from a distance even in the dark and dangerous streets of a big city’s impoverished neighborhood.
And I used to watch a little corner of the window on my way to school, and I stopped just as I would be out of sight, through the projects, in the dark, and I’d turn around and there’d be the living room windows, and in the tiniest spot of one corner I knew whose head that was. She’s going [waving]. So life for her was no crystal stair.

Francis alluded to a poem by African-American poet Langston Hughes entitled “Mother to Son.” He included a copy of this poem in his collection of photographs to which he added poetry that he believed had been relevant to his resilience. In Hughes’ poem a mother encourages her son to never give up, as she never has even though her existence has been filled with the vicissitudes of a hard and impoverished life. The poem speaks of determination and courage. Her tenacious uphill climb through life, never stopping, always hoping, reaching for the top and whatever it may hold, seemed to be for Francis a metaphor for his mother. She, as the woman in the poem, had little formal education and as the mother in the poem, never stopped in her quest to offer her sons better than what she had. In Francis’s eyes she led them as a sage, not only by means of her advice, but also by her example.

Julia, Carolina, Viviana, Dalia and Francis all credited their mothers with being role models of courage and strength in their lives. At first glance it may seem paradoxical as all of them were at one point or another, victims of some level of domestic violence. Their offspring, however, chose to see them as survivors, not victims. For example, Julia’s father, an alcoholic, verbally and physically abused his wife and children.

She said, “It was bad because my father was a chronic alcoholic back then. He started drinking when I was about three years old. And when he drank, he got violent.”
Julia’s father victimized his children and wife creating a climate of domestic violence that sometimes seemed almost impossible to bear. She said, “There were a lot of things that went on with the alcohol and the abuse. Everybody was in fear because my father would turn violent.” Julia told me about being terribly scared many times during her childhood and adolescence as a result of her father’s abusive behavior. One day stood out for her as a particularly frightening one. She said, “He took a belt and grabbed my mother outside to hang her.” Helpless, Julia and her siblings cried for help from inside the house, hopeful that their voices would serve to propel their father out of his violent rapture. Fortunately, her father did not succeed in robbing Julia’s mother of her life that day.

Sometimes Julia was the object of her father’s alcoholic rage. Her mother would try in vain to protect her. She said, “When he would beat me, she would get in the middle, but then she would get hit, too. So it was total abuse, for everybody.” Eventually Julia’s dad engaged in an affair with his goddaughter’s mother, a violation of one of the most sacred relationships in the Puerto Rican culture. Godparents are comadres and compadres, concepts introduced to Puerto Rico by the Catholic religion during colonial times. Puerto Ricans think of it as co-parents. According to the Catholic tradition, the godparents are expected to take on the role of parenting the child if parents are not able to do so and to carry on the instilment of the church’s teachings. (For an excellent description of this relationship, see Stycos, 1952.) Julia’s father ran off with the comadre and abandoned his family. Julia was still in elementary school at the time. Her mother found out about her husband’s decision to leave the family by means of a letter sent by the comadre informing Julia’s mother that her husband now belonged to her.
Julia’s father would visit once every one or two years. During one of his visits with the family Julia told him about her college dreams and his response took her breath away. She said, “If I wanted to go to college, I would have to go to work the same way he did because he wasn’t planning to help me. And then he said, ‘You’re stupid.’” She was a high school junior at the time.

Julia’s mother worked outside of the home and learned to sew to make ends meet. Julia expressed admiration for her mother describing her as a tenacious woman. She said that her own strength came from, “Just looking at my mom who was a strong figure in my life. But just by admiring her will, her strong will, that’s what got me through.” Carolina also spoke of her mother as a role model of strength in her life. She said, “My strength comes from my mother. Her personality, her character. Didn’t realize that ‘til now. Mom is strong, strong-willed, positive.”

Notwithstanding, both Julia and Carolina made a conscious decision to not follow in their mother’s footsteps. They did not want to have to put up with the abuse and or neglect that their mothers did. This was the same for other participants in this sample. Wolin and Wolin (1993) called this “differentiation.” I have organized this topic under the theme of “intuition,” taking a cue from Wolin and Wolin, and in the section discussing the personal attributes of the participants.

From the participants’ stories we can see that there are several ways in which a father’s absence can be felt. Although he continued to live with his family, Carolina’s father maintained affairs with different women, leaving his wife and children to work in their small and failing shop in a small town in Puerto Rico.
By the time Carolina’s mother conceived the youngest of Carolina’s siblings, “Dad was fooling around with a lot of people. There were arguments, missing money from the store.” Carolina said that her father would leave her mother tending the store and he would “take a shower, and he would take off to another town, not come back ‘til late. Mom was there, and therefore as the kids were born, the kids were put in the store. We did not like that.” Her father’s philandering increased exponentially. She said, “I could see what was happening with these women. There was a gun in the house, and there were arguments back and forth and I could see this thing happening.” Carolina knew things were terribly wrong at home.

As mentioned above, Carolina, like Julia, wanted to have an outcome different from her mother’s who, she said, “died not having had a house of her own.” Carolina’s parents’ small shop imploded under the pressure of her father’s poor financial management. It became too large a load for his wife and young children to bear alone. Her father’s dream had died long before, as the business he had imagined he would build was ill fated from its inception. The moment the materials arrived in Puerto Rico, a large storm destroyed the machinery on which he had spent his life’s savings. Perhaps his amorous indiscretions served to affirm a bruised macho ego just like Stycos (1952) described in his vintage study so many years ago. Viviana also had an absent father. In fact, she had two.

Viviana was only one and a half years old when her father died in a tragic accident. She never got to really know her father outside of the stories she had garnered from family members. The arrival of a stepfather at age five was perhaps expected to fill the void left by her dad, but in Viviana’s case, it was the onset of a series of nightmarish
experiences. Her stepfather, a professional man, deemed highly intelligent, was also an alcoholic who verbally and physically abused his stepchildren. Discord and fear were the order of the day during Viviana’s formative years. She said, “Well you know coming from an abused home where my mother’s husband was very abusive, physically and mentally, towards my brother and I.”

As I reviewed the transcripts of Viviana’s interviews, I could not help but notice that it seemed like she could not bring herself to express words that might in any way suggest a connection to her stepfather. She used the phrase “my mother’s husband,” not “my stepfather,” almost as a reaffirmation of the distance that physically and emotionally existed between them, and that she wanted to maintain between her and this man. Perhaps doing this assured her spot in a mystic, safer, place. Although she did not exactly describe her mother as strong, she articulated observing her and wanting to emulate her in some ways. “You know I think really from my mother I saw a lot, that you know she was educated and I thought that that’s definitely something that I wanted to pursue,” In Viviana’s case, and similar to others in the sample, her mother represented a role model of strength and or determination. Her fathers, both the biological one and the stepfather, were absent from her life— one because of death and the other, because he was bound by alcoholism and perhaps too emotionally bankrupt to afford the dispensation of a little bit of kindness or empathy toward his stepchildren.

Not all fathers in the sample were absent out of lack of love or care. Some were absent because of a solid sense of responsibility to provide for their families or the sense of duty to the U.S. In the case of one of the fathers, a soldier, anger control issues added to the distance between family members for years after he returned from the service.
Francis did not get to live with his father again until he was three or four years old because his dad was in the army. Francis, born during one of the wars, lived alone with his mother. His mom had been his sole caretaker until his father rejoined the family upon his return from active duty. Francis was between three and four years of age. He said, “So it takes a while to bond. Those early years of my life that I can recall, it was a lot of fighting, a lot of yelling and screaming and yelling and screaming, even all throughout my life.”

As we see the theme of domestic drama surfaced here too. It must have been hard for Francis’s parents to get reacquainted with each other after such a long absence. Francis remembers his mom as stoic and strong, although he remembers to have at least once, seen his mother in a physically vulnerable position as a result of one of his father’s angry tirades.

Francis lived with his parents in a “railroad apartment” in the housing projects of a big city. One afternoon, Francis had settled down to play in room adjacent to where his parents sat. Suddenly, “I heard that the yelling and screaming was really something. I heard them really yelling at each other.” Francis ran into the living room to see what the matter was. He said, “She’s sitting on the couch and my father is yelling at her saying something. He was twisting her arms and she was screaming. He was twisting her arms, just twisting her arms.” Looking back at that incident, Francis concluded that something must have been deeply troubling his dad and that his physical attack on Francis’s mother must have been a manifestation of his feelings of frustration. Francis saw his father standing over his mother twisting her arms and screaming at her. He said, “I don’t know
if I said anything, but I ran to the bathroom and I remember hiding between the wall and the toilet and I had trouble with my bowels.”

Francis’s mother stepped into the bathroom “and she saw” her little boy hiding behind the commode in such a vulnerable state. Displaying masterful restraint of her own fear, she managed to calm Francis down and speak to him about leaving in words that he could relate to. She told him not to worry and that everything was “going to be okay.” She said, “We’re just going to go visit grandma because I wanted to go see grandma. You know the way you are when you’re in a store and you want something. So let’s go.” Francis’s mom led him out of the apartment. He said, “But as we were leaving the apartment we had shoes flying over us and we had all kinds of stuff, just ducking, ducking, and we left very quickly.”

Francis also told me about his mom and how she handled the threat made to him by two bullies on his first day of the first grade. She had managed the situation responsibly, not only maintaining her dignity, but preserving Francis’s as well. He described his mother as an involved parent a parental trait which he believed was an important factor for developing resilience. He said, “It’s the involved parent that has also allowed you to grow. For example, not too involved, up just to a certain point, respecting me as who ever I was as a child, even at 6 years old.”

The stories are similar, with different shades of gray clouds that threatened to obscure the path to resilience for this study’s participants under the “sun of home.” Dalia also had an alcoholic father. Her mother insisted that she prepare herself to never be financially dependent on a man. Speaking of her experience growing up in her home she stated that her experience with her father was not a positive one. “He was an alcoholic”
and “very abusive, verbally very abusive.” Dalia said that her father “was not a positive role model.” He practiced extreme corporal punishment.

Dalia’s brothers were physically abused by her father. He hit them “like men and he didn’t care that they were still kids.” This did not mean that the females were not corporally punished as she recalls getting a *pela* which literally translated means a peeling, for lending out some items of her sister’s clothing to a needy girl without asking permission first. A pela means to physically whip a child with a belt or similar instrument. In other words, it is a beating. Dalia said, “*Me metieron la pela* [they gave me the beating] because I lied.” We will revisit this story later on as it relates to the participants’ spirit of generosity and altruism.

I can imagine the reader cringing at the idea that anyone could be so cruel as to subject a child to this kind of punishment. That seems especially true if the reader is against corporal punishment. For most of the participants who experienced corporal punishment, recounts were matter of fact and not filled with anger, regret or bitterness. This is except for those who suffered unwarranted or extreme punishment at the hands of an adult whose behavior was abusive or manifested as a result of substance abuse. Otherwise the sentiment that most seemed to share may be best understood in the words of Carmen.

We have a great relationship with my parents and that’s the way they used to do things at that time. She [mom] was the one [to] smack us with a belt and all that. All that stuff, yeah. But it was never traumatic because after we got the *pela*, [beating] everything was okay. Yeah, everything was back to normal. You just did something wrong and this is your punishment. Okay you take it.
Carmen’s mother was a domineering mom whom she described as strong, enterprising, and creative. Carmen’s mom expected perfection from her little girls. In this case, and in Marlena’s, fathers were exalted, as their absence from home stemmed from long work days and wanting to provide for their families. The most significant difference between the two was that while Carmen’s mother was very demanding, she was also very supportive. In Marlena’s case, her mom was physically abusive. In fact, Marlena’s choice of words was “violent,” but she clarified that “slapping us or hitting us” was the only way her mom knew how to discipline her children. She said, “Today she couldn’t do what she did then.” Marlena was sure that in the era when this study took place, a parent yielding the type of corporal punishment that her mother did, would be immediately reported to the local Department of Children and Family Services. She said that her mother, “would just grab anything in her hand and just whoop, hit us, and take off cable and hit us with the cable. Whatever she had in her hand, that’s what she would hit us with and she didn’t care.” Marlena said did not believe that her mother was physically abusive out of malice. She was certain that her mom had only replicated the discipline model that her own parents used with her. Marlena reported that, “We were very, I think scared of her more than anything. She would lift her hand and we would run. [laughter]” Marlena described her father as being a calm presence within the household. She said, “He wouldn’t hit us a lot, but my mom, everything was hitting. You know that’s the best way she knew.”

Corporal punishment was used in the households of most of the participants sometimes in an extreme fashion. For example, Marlena had scars from some of the instances when her mother beat her. She decided that she would not raise her children in fear but would still pass on the core values that her mother tried to teach her. Marlena’s
father was absent in another manner. He, the sole provider for a large family, worked several jobs to ensure that his family’s basic needs were met. Marlena said, “I was his princess.” She admired her father, whom she described as a lifelong learner who even at an advanced age loved tinkering with technology, such as new computers and electronic gadgets. Marlena’s father went as far as the third grade, but he taught himself how to read English as well as higher level Spanish. She reported that he had excellent entrepreneurial and mathematical skills. It wasn’t that her father did not use corporal punishment, but Marlena reported that he had a calming personality, while her mom was more boisterous. Note that Marlena seemed to believe that her mother did the best she could, suggesting that her mother’s physical abuse was not out of malice, but was a manifestation of her lack of knowing any better, and her emulation of the method of discipline that her own parents used with her. As mentioned earlier, Marlena made a conscious decision to break the pattern of abuse.

It is noteworthy that the participants who had abusive or absent parents did not seem to internalize their parents’ behavior as a reflection of a deficit in the participants’ child persona. Prelow et al. (2007) had suggested earlier that family environments which are not chaotic and where monitoring is high, with established routines, seem to foster social competence in children from high risk environments. These participants view their parents as doing the best they could with what they had. They were expected to follow rules period even if sometimes the approach to enforcing the rules was not the best one. Although one could deem the emotional environment in their homes as chaotic, the data suggest that there were sets of rules and expectations that were non-negotiable in the participants’ homes. It is possible that those rules and expectations acted as a promotive
factor in the resilience journeys of the people in this sample. With the exception of the participants who suffered abuse by intoxicated parents, varied justifications accompanied their stories of domestic woes. Some of the fathers had been orphaned at a young age; some of the mothers had had rough beginnings. For example, Armando described his mother as strong, and added that, “She was not as expressive as she should have been.” He justified this by saying that his mother “had a very tough childhood. She had been abandoned.” Armando said that his mother had to “overcome a lot and I think that made her a very strong person.” He thought that in some way his mother’s early negative experiences interfered with her ability to freely express her emotions as an adult and parent.

In every case there was a parent who seemed to step in to calm the storms at home. In most cases the mothers took on this role. These men and women seemed to believe that their parents just wanted them to be able to reach a place even if at an arms’ length away, that may become their promised land. Said “Promised Land” would be that place existing beyond the confines of their parents’ realities. Francis summed it up in this fashion: “So it’s just how things happen, to go from you know when you look all the way back and all they wanted was just to have a little better than the way they had it.”

The participants in this study seem to have figured out the way to find the light hidden just behind the clouds of absent fathers and domestic hurdles. What they perceived as their mothers’ strength seems to have inspired them to believe that they too could muster the strength to rise above these obstacles. Poverty represents one of the obstacles that the individuals in this sample faced and thus a theme common to most of
the participants. It has been identified as a risk factor in the literature (Earvolino-Ramírez, 2007; Rutter, 1999; Werner & Smith, 2001).

**Poverty.** Although poverty was a common theme among the participants in this study, not all of them experienced it in the same way or during early childhood. Two of the participants lived in county supported housing that they commonly referred to as “the projects” of two major U.S. cities when they were children. They marveled at how in spite of their humble beginnings they had come so far. This sentiment was clear in Francis’s words when with eyes welled up with tears and a broken voice he told me the following story.

I’m on a boat in Key West drinking wine and having a sunset cruise. People look like they are in a Bacardi commercial, just so nice. This has just happened maybe, I don’t know, maybe eight years ago or whatever, and I am looking out of this yacht, because Education will get you in some nice places, and I am looking out, holding my glass of wine and I’m looking at the shoreline of Key West all lit up and I said to myself, “Wow. You really have come a long way, from [emotional] 7361 Larsson Avenue, Apartment 3B in [a big] City.”

He talked about the dreams that he believed his father was not able to attain. He recalled his dad showing them pictures of the beautiful homes and castles he had seen while in Europe during his military service. Francis said that the frustration of not being able to give his family the opportunity to experience these things for themselves or his inability to provide them with a nicer place to call home, may have been in great part the source of his frustration that sometimes manifested as rage. He said, “I think it’s what he
would’ve wished for us, rather than just a two-bedroom apartment in the projects where urine was a steady floor. Or all kinds of other disgusting things that we saw growing up.”

Marlena lived with both parents, and they did their best to keep their children fed. “We were raised poor, okay? I do remember living in the projects, but I don’t remember going to sleep without eating.” She asserted, “I come from a poor family.” Emma’s parents both worked to help bridge the path for their daughters to the educational opportunities that they had not been able to access. Their efforts did not go unnoticed.

Emma and her sister were very young when their parents relocated the family to a big city in the U.S. The parents were clear with Emma and her sister about their reasons for migrating to the U.S. “The purpose that brought them was our education.” Emma said that she understood, even at a young age, the hardships that her parents suffered so that she and her sister could obtain a high school diploma. “I understood what they had to go through getting to work, the winter and all its problems on the train, subway, and my mother having to go through those long, huge blocks to get to work.” Emma’s mother worked at a factory that stood in front of a pier. Her daily commute to work was long and difficult, especially during the winter months.

Emma said that her mother became an extremely nervous person. She smoked heavily and bit her nails, “to a point that there weren’t nails anymore to bite off.” Every evening Emma’s father would go to bed much earlier than his wife and daughters because he was the first to rise to leave for work in the morning. He was also the first to come home from work each day, shortly after his daughters came home from school. Emma said that he would “start dinner so that my mother wouldn’t have to cook, and we understood.”
Julia also understood that her mother was working hard to make ends meet after her father left the household. Julia said that she gave her mother a lot of credit for overcoming the obstacles she faced. Her mother began working as a seamstress and taught Julia how to sew. Julia said, “Well, if she could do this, I could learn, and probably that would help me in the future.”

Carolina’s mother struggled alone as well even though she was still living with her husband. “About a year after we were in Puerto Rico, Mom ends up pregnant and we did not have a place.” A wicker chair served as her new baby brother’s crib because the family lacked the financial means to buy a crib. Carolina said that her mother feared that when the baby began turning in bed he would fall off the chair and get hurt. Carolina was 11 years old when her brother was born and she took care of him while her mother worked at their shop. A year later her mother had a baby girl. Carolina said, “I would watch over my brother and sister, cook, clean, take care of all the details and still be a kid in middle school.”

Some of the participants had to take on roles that were beyond what might be expected for their chronological ages at the time. Just like Carolina had to take on the role of caregiver and homemaker in her house, Ricardo, who lived in the country when he was a little boy, had to help. Thirteen siblings and their parent living together and making the best out of the few resources available to them, he said, “I had to share the same clothes. I had to sleep in a room with three other brothers.” Ricardo remembers that he had to give up some things in order to contribute to the family’s survival after his father left them. He said, “My mother had a small business, so sometimes I’d have to pick up some of the workload.” Ricardo believed that he had to contribute to the wellbeing of his family. He
Como el cantar del coquí

said, “Instead of having time to play around, you grow fast and you’ve got to learn to use that to your advantage and make the best out of it.”

Julia said, “If my mother needed groceries, I was the one that went out for groceries. Everything that had to do with the house, I, it was like the role was inversed. I was the one that, that took over.” Although she had older siblings, Julia took on the main responsibility of helping her mother.

A middle class values perspective may raise questions in one’s mind regarding the assumptions that perhaps we make about people in the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder (Payne, 2005). Many of the participants in this study experienced poverty during their childhoods or youth. Others experienced it during adulthood. None of them came from wealthy families. As we have gleaned from the stories shared by the participants, bouts with poverty were sometimes triggered by the departure of a parent, in most cases, the father. The latter is a form of situational poverty (Payne, 1996). If one stops to think empathically about it, we must ask ourselves what we would do if suddenly all our resources were gone and we had to find a way to survive within a whole new set of circumstances. Not speaking the language that can help us identify and access new resources is likely to test a person’s resilience. Carmen experienced just that when she came to the U.S.

Carmen had taught in Puerto Rico for a few years prior to her arrival in the U.S. She was not one of the teachers hired during the recruiting wave of the nineties. Her husband found work at a factory, but the money was scarce and Carmen did not speak English. They were displaced for awhile and lived with her in-laws. They did not have full health coverage and so the cheapest way to deal with the natural outcome of a
pregnancy, birth, was to fly to Puerto Rico and have the baby there in a public hospital. At home in Puerto Rico, her family helped her access the resources needed to get through the birth of her child and later join her husband again in the U.S.

Emma remembered both her parents having to work to afford living in the big Metropolis. She told me that somehow gaining an understanding of her parents’ plight compelled her to at a very young age take on responsibilities around the apartment in order to lighten her parents’ load. Simply put, she understood that it would take the cooperation of everyone in the household to keep her family afloat. She told me that at age seven she would come home to an empty apartment after picking up her sister from school. Once home she proceeded to make the beds and start the beans for dinner so that her father could prepare the rest of the meal when he came home from work.

One might question how anyone could allow a seven year old to use a cooking range at all. Starting the beans for dinner meant sorting the dried legumes, washing them, and then putting them in boiling water to cook before the other ingredients could be added. The danger of a little girl alone, engaging in an activity that included propane gas, fire and scalding water might make one cringe. That is, by today’s Western social standards.

It is possible that in the day and age of this study there may be children in situations similar to Emma’s. Some may be facing circumstances that may seem, or be worse than hers. I have seen cases when a parent has been accused of neglect for leaving a child under a certain age home alone. Emma’s situation can probably be found in the histories of many others whose familial circumstances pushed them into the adoption of roles that poorly matched their chronological age. I believe this is not exclusive to the
Puerto Rican culture. On the other hand, there are many children out there who refuse to help with chores around the house even when their parents’ requests are age appropriate. In my experience this happens frequently. The point here is that the participants in this study knew that they were an integral part of their families’ survival. This is something that they related to their resilience.

Emma and her sister were loved and supported, but they were neither coddled nor sheltered from the reality of the family’s struggles. Emma felt that she was a part of a greater purpose. She, as others we have seen here, was a contributor to her family’s ability to be self-sustaining. She did not have the sense of entitlement that frequently precedes the phrase, “I didn’t ask to be born,” and that suggests that the act of birth alone constitutes the right to an entitled way of life that includes taking from our parents and never having to give back. These participants grew up in environments where they were expected to honor the value of family and make their own contributions to its wellbeing.

Armando became the sole support of his family at a very young age. He had not been out of high school for much more than a year when one of his parents was diagnosed with stage-four cancer. While at the hospital, his other parent received a telephone call with the notification of a layoff. Armando was in college at the time. He said, “I was nineteen and I had to take care of my [parent’s] illness, take care of my younger siblings. I had to take care of supporting a household with 450 dollars every 2 weeks.” Armando took out several credit cards in order to have some financial backup when he was unable to cover all the needs of his family with his earnings. He said, “Whatever I couldn’t afford I’d put it on the credit card. It was either put it on the credit card or go hungry. I did what I had to do during that time to support my family.” His love
for his family, solidarity and sense of responsibility drove him to drop out of college and work full time to put food on the table and pay most of the bills for his family.

Armando was able to keep his household afloat during that period. When I asked about what helped him get through this trying time, he credited his family. Even though his extended family did not have the economic resources to provide financial support, their love saw him through this difficult period. He stated that “Even though they couldn’t support me financially, they did support me emotionally. They were very, very supportive emotionally. So I had their help. But yeah, it was my extended family that helped me out a lot.”

Elisa faced the possibility of not only death, but also financial devastation during her divorce. She became very ill and was hospitalized several times. The medications that her doctors administered only worsened her condition by adding life-threatening side effects to her already crippling symptoms. A single mother trying to not lose her home and to raise her children without much support from her ex-husband in a city where she had no family, Elisa refused to give up. The legacy of strong family ties passed on to her during her formative years provided the foundation for overcoming the adversities brought on by her failing health. Her sense of responsibility to her family and her faith sustained her during the moments when she felt her life slipping away. One of the pictures she selected for this study shows her in a hospital bed with cables and other medical paraphernalia attached to her frail body. Showing me the picture she said, “Esa soy yo con la cabeza llena de cables y bien flaca. So eso me representa una parte triste y que no se podía controlar, que no se sabía para dónde iba parte del proceso de enfermedad.” [That is me with a head filled with cables and very skinny. So that
Como el cantar del coquí

represents a sad part and [one] that could not be controlled, that no one knew what direction part of the illness process was taking.] I asked Elisa what gave her hope during that time and she assured me that it was not easy. She relinquished the situation to God and found the motivation to survive her pain and physical anguish; the will to live, in the desire to come home to be with her children.

These stories relate to the “sun of home” because it seems that the experiences these participants had with their families and the values learned through their interactions with them at an early age, gave them a point of reference for using their learned sense of family to overcome adversities during their childhoods and later on in life. Marlena said, “Whatever we did, we did it together, and I think that was a plus. Today you don’t see that anymore. We don’t see that. We ate together. Dinner was we would sit all together and talk, get along.” Family harmony in the midst of turmoil seemed to be an ameliorating factor in Marlena’s home life. Family meant a world to her and it transcended into the extended family. This leads the discussion of influences under the “sun of home” to the final high frequency theme in this section.

**Extended family.** Every single one of the participants alluded to guiding principles, character traits and practices inculcated and valued in their families. From the hill towns of Puerto Rico to the projects of two metropolitan cities in the U.S., work ethic, effort, respect, determination, and integrity came through as if these participants had all read the same book before engaging in the interview process for the collection of this study’s data. Metaphorically, they had done just that as their stories seemed to reveal.
Entitle it as you will. For any version of a title that expresses the positive experiences with family that the participants claimed contributed to their resilience will do.

They spoke of close knit families where support transcended the monetary aspect of help. The stories passed on from one generation to another, role modeling of what Dalia called “guiding principles” and the expectations for behavior all came together to shine brightly when other rays emitted by this “sun” seemed opaque, their beams of light rendered weak by clouds of adversity.

Expectations started at home and were supported and collaboratively enforced by the extended family. Carmen, her cousins and sister helped their grandmother by going over and cleaning her house for her. Ricardo stayed at his grandparents’ house sometimes and obliged to his grandmother’s expectation of praying together as we saw earlier. These activities were manifestations of the respect afforded to adults in the family and expressions of love for treasured family members.

One of the ways in which Puerto Ricans traditionally show respect to our elders is by asking for a blessing when we greet them. Francis very accurately described this practice when he talked about family. He lamented that this practice seemed to be fading away within the Latino culture. He provided the following description in his usual humorous fashion.

That tradition was a very pretty tradition, a tradition to be humorously embraced when you realized that you really couldn’t sit down to any visit for about 15 minutes until after you asked all of your relatives and uncles, “Bendición, bendición, bendición. [Blessing, blessing, blessing.]” all the way through. And then starting a half hour early before leaving my dad would say, “Okay, váyanse
Como el cantar del coquí. [translates] Start saying your goodbyes, that we’re on our way,” and you know you had to say, “Bendición, [Blessing.]” “Dios te bendiga. [God bless you.],” and it was such a papal scene, even within our family [laughter]. The only thing that was missing was the ring. But you know that was quite a very pretty thing to see and now very rarely do I see it and it’s just sad because that established a position. It established the respect that you needed to have for that elderly person, and that they had earned in some way, that respect. Whether you knew them or not, they had earned that respect because your parent was now telling you, “This is so and so and you are to ask for a blessing from that person.”

The tone was set at the onset of every interaction with adults in the family with the asking of the blessing. As Francis described the process in light of his experiences, memories of my own with this tradition came forward, and with them the realization that most of the people in my life from whom I lovingly requested a blessing, are now gone. I wanted to share my thoughts with him, but alas, this was about the participants’ stories and I the researcher, dutifully refrained, bracketing my thoughts and focusing on his story and the meaning it might convey.

The most significant extended family members for the participants seemed to be the grandparents. All of them mentioned their grandparents and for most, when they did, they seemed to be transported to a very special place. Armando said that in his earliest years his grandparents were very loving and supportive. “Well, I had a good relationship with my grandparents.” He added, “Everyone, aunts, uncles, when my grandparents were alive, everybody. Everybody, cousins, everybody has been extremely supportive in my family.” Carmen insisted that she was “very close to my grandparents,” Her parents had
Como el cantar del coquí

established the expectation for Carmen and her sisters to obey and assist her grandparents, their advanced age placing them first in the family hierarchy. “My grandmother and my grandfather always came first. Then we came second, ‘cause they were old.”

The elderly people in my participants’ lives were not disposable like yesterday’s newspaper, to be cast away, far from the youthful families springing from the seeds that they had started. Dalia’s pictures told the story as she showed me the couple that she believed started it all and without whom she would not exist as the person she was. She said, “In my eyes, my grandparents, they’re responsible for me being here and my experiences.” It was a love story set at the turn of the nineteenth century and one that she was proud of. At the time when this study took place, her family reunited every year to celebrate and honor their grandparents’ legacy. She spoke of unity and love as she proudly described her family. She had a cousin whom she had admired all her life. “I have a cousin who was also my role model. She was of course older than me who I always looked up to: responsible, pretty, [and] faith-based.” Dalia also had an uncle whom she described as caring and generous. She described him and the things he did for others. She saw in him a passion for helping others that she believed had been passed from generation to generation in her family. She said, “I remember as a little girl, wherever there was a need, financial, moral, spiritual, everyone went to go get my uncle Ignacio, tío [uncle] Ignacio. So he was the pillar of the family.”

Dalia’s uncle died in an unfortunate accident, struck by an oncoming vehicle while aiding a friend who was experiencing car trouble and who had asked him for help. As Dalia proudly expressed it, “It was a fatal death, pero [but] you know, we said, ‘He
died doing what he liked to do.”’” Dalia said that she reveled in the opportunity to help people whether they were relatives, friends, students or strangers a characteristic that she claimed started under the “sun of home.”

_Eso yo veo que la semilla la sembró mi abuelito y mi abuela y después la ví en mi tío, la veo en mi prima. La veo en mí y la veo en mi hijo._ [That I see that my grandfather and grandmother planted the seed, and then I saw it in my uncle, I see it in my cousin. I see it in me and I see it in my son.] You know? _Y la veo hasta en mi nietecito chiquito_ [And I even see it in my little grandson] to an extent for his age.

Claudia reminisced about her aunts with their knack for storytelling, one of them making a joke out of family situations providing much needed levity in times of stress. She said, “_Mis tías eran las que contaban las historias. Mi tía, ella siempre sacaba una historia para todo de la familia. Nos hacía reír._ [My aunts were the storytellers. My aunt would always make up a story for everything concerning the family. She made us laugh.]”

Claudia’s grandfather was the “_capitán del barco_ [captain of the ship]” not only providing for the nine permanent residents in his home, but also for his extended family. Claudia’s home was a hub for the family, the center for correspondence and the point of departure for visits to doctors for family members of lesser means. The house was a three room dwelling. Claudia expressed that her grandfather and grandmother were role models of altruism. From them she learned the importance of helping others and from others like her aunts she learned that humor can help deescalate stress.
Viviana said that she had an extended family that was very involved in her life. She expressed gratitude for her grandparents who made so many of her childhood wishes come true. She said, “You know even like any little amusement park or any fair or anything we wanted to do, it happened like just magically almost.” Julia recalled when she set out for college. On a federal grant and with no money for the venture, her family pitched in and helped her achieve her college dream. While her father had already told her that she would not have his support, his sisters stepped in to help. Julia said, “You know, one would bring me groceries so I could take to college, the other one would bring me fabric so I could make my own clothes.” Viviana spoke of going to fairs and amusement parks with the family. Similarly, Marlena held very dear memories of her family gatherings. Christmas and New Year’s Eve were favorite holidays of Marlena’s family. Cousins, aunts, and uncles would gather to celebrate together. She said, “There were always parties. I remember parrandas and all that.” [Parrandas are a Puerto Rican Christmas tradition where friends stop by in the middle of the night. They serenade you with traditional and popular Christmas songs usually with the accompaniment of guitars and other autochthonous musical instruments. The recipients of the visit open the door and a party ensues.]

The value of grandparents for many of the participants cannot be overstated. Francis credited his maternal grandmother for the preservation of his parents’ marriage. Far from putting down her son in law, she sought to help her daughter understand him and find ways to make the marriage work. Francis’s father found in her a loving and accepting mother figure and he cherished her until the day he died. “Grandmother never uttered a word against my dad. Never. My dad never forgot that, and definitely loved her
all his life.” With intense emotion Francis repeated the words he heard his grandmother say to his mom about his father. “‘He’s a good man. You have to support him, and if he’s willing to change, please, for the sake of your son,’ and so we went back and things weren’t too bad, but they weren’t great.”

Under the “sun of home” these participants learned about faith and family togetherness. They learned about laughter, generosity, and forgiveness. These core values emerged over and over yielding the picture of the personal attributes that we will discuss in the section on resiliencies and of the meaning of resilience that the participants conveyed. Their families far from perfect, dealt with absent fathers, domestic turmoil, poverty, and tragedy among other things that constituted a part of the makeup of the participants’ homes. Not all of them experienced all of these things and some of them had a greater share of them than others, but what remained constant among all, was their ability to identify the rays that infused hope into their lives.

They spoke of home not from the stance of a victim who regrets being dealt a difficult hand. They took the best and left the rest in the past. They seemed to access the unhappy memories from an observer’s standpoint, not internalizing the bad, and in a certain manner, magnifying the positive to find the hidden lessons. Under the “sun of home” these resilient resilients flourished like the stubborn little sprout that pushes through a crack in a concrete slab and refuses to perish.

Inexorably tied to the “sun of home” as we have seen, were traditions, practices and expectations tied to the cultural roots of these individuals. The “sun of community and culture” gave way to beliefs that in some cases had been modified and in others reaffirmed. Let us take a peek into their lives under this “sun.”
The “Sun of Community and Culture”

Ungar (2008), as we saw in the review of the literature, insisted that in order to effectively define resilience it must be framed within a cultural context. The main purpose of this study was to define resilience in light of the meaning that the phenomenon had for twelve Puerto Rican educators. Ungar’s suggestion seems adequate and Piirto’s (2002a) “sun of community and culture” provides the perfect setting for the discussion regarding the participants’ cultural context.

Community resources. Some of the communities in which these participants grew up offered opportunities for entertainment and self discovery. Dalia remembered the recreation center where she and her siblings had the chance to engage in activities free of cost that would have otherwise proven prohibitive given her family’s financial situation. You may recall that the participants were asked to select photographs of people, places and or things that they considered significant to their resilience. In between interviews for this study Dalia had the opportunity to visit Puerto Rico and among her collection of pictures a photo of the sign in front of her former community’s recreation center suggests that she related that place with her resilience. She had fond memories of the recreation center. There her brothers participated in a proxy boy scouts’ club and she engaged in different types of sports. “We learned to play volleyball and everything was free. It was just something to keep the kids off the street. We learned to play baseball so it was a community center to keep the kids from the community involved.” Dalia expressed a firm belief that if we want to help today’s youth overcome adversity, communities need to have places where children can engage in positive activities and be safe from the dangers
lurking in the streets. She said that she knows from experience that programs of that nature can make a huge difference.

Emma grew up during an era when the settlement movement was popular. These settlements were basically community centers located in impoverished areas which provided different types of services to families and children. The home base for the one Emma described was a local church and the program run by Greek Orthodox Ministers. “They were there and they provided different activities for the kids in the block in the area and all of this.” The activities included the opportunity to spend the summer with an affluent family. “The people in the blocks, the kids, one summer, including this boyfriend that I had had who was two years older than me, go to Martha’s Vineyard. Each child that went lived with a different family.”

That summer some of them came back with a standing invitation to continue to visit with their host families. Emma’s boyfriend’s host even offered to pay for his college tuition if, when he finished high school, he decided to attend college. The children who were allowed to have this cross-cultural experience and the ones who stayed behind may have both benefitted from the event. Those who went to Martha’s Vineyard that summer came back with stories of the things that they had seen and done. Perhaps allowing their friends and family members catch a glimpse through their stories into a world unknown to them, offered more possibilities than the limited resources they had experienced in the depressed part of the inner city where they abided. Emma was one who did not have the chance to go away that summer, but you would not know for even after more than four decades she recounted the event with a vivacity that leaves one wondering how a vicarious experience could yield such a powerful imprint on a person’s psyche.
Como el cantar del coquí

Claudia found her first career dream through her participation in her community’s Civil Air Patrol. She participated in drills and enjoyed every nuance of the military culture that she was exposed to during that time. She was promoted to sergeant and hoped to pursue a career in the military; a dream that would be stifled because she happened to be a female in a culture where her gender group has been traditionally assigned roles that certainly did not include camping out with strange men.

Marlena lived in the projects, where she had close relationships with neighbors with whom she participated in organized children’s activities. These included celebrations of major holidays such as Christmas and Easter. She reported that she did not feel stigmatized for residing in low income housing. She said, “It’s totally different from today. You mention projects; they go ‘Oh my God, where are you coming from?’” Those were some of the best times she remembered spending during her childhood. She declared, “I remember there were a lot of activities.” For example, she spoke of going to the park on Easter day to hunt for Easter eggs, and to welcome “the bunny rabbit” which would arrive in a helicopter every year. During the Christmas holidays, Marlena remembered going to a children’s activity which included a visit from Santa Claus. She said, “There were a lot of activities for us to do and go to the park, but it wasn’t like today.”

Francis found his way to services offered in his community. During his adolescence he found out that the city center’s ice skating rink had free skating sessions for kids 14 and under. Francis and his friend Pedro each bought a pair of ice-skates at a local thrift store. Pedro found his skates there first, and he told Francis about it. In this story two poor boys from the projects would skate among the rest, in their thrift store
skates having found in each other a source of support to make it happen. Francis said, “When I was much older and looked at, I think that they were girl skates because they were so thin, but they were figure skates.” The boys spent many fun times together at the skating rink. Francis said, “Even though my friend Willy had gotten himself some hockey skates and he was just going to [swoosh] throughout.”

If we pause and think about this vignette, the fact that the city offered kids of lesser economic resources the opportunity to access an activity that would have been outside of their financial means stands out, but something else seems to jump out from this story. These two boys problem solved together and achieved their goal of ice skating there with children whose parents could afford it. So what if they had had to settle for a pair of old girl figure skates instead of the bright new pair of athletic hockey skates like their friend’s?

Other community activities came as a byproduct of the individual’s religious affiliation. For example, several of the female participants reported having belonged to the Catholic female youth organization known as Las Hijas de María, [Daughters of Mary]. This organization promotes the display of virtues such as obedience, humility, simplicity, prudence, apostolic life and the like by its members. (See www.Catholic.net for more information.) A young woman who is devoted to following the precepts established by this organization would not dream of dishonoring neither her church nor her parents. Even the females not reporting formal membership in the Daughters of Mary, reported participating in catechism classes and other religious activities. The communal and social aspect of the community church cannot be overstated according to these participants. Francis shared an interesting insight regarding this theme.
It was the socialization aspect of going to the church that really socialized me with other kids where I began to really see that there were kids worse off than I was, and yet there were kids that were better off than I was financially speaking, economically speaking, but that within all of us there was this core, this basic need, fat, skinny, tall, short, rich or poor, there was this need to be a part of something.

Every activity that they were able to access in the community, whether through church or others, provided the opportunity to be a part of something positive where perhaps the gift of new insights awaited them. These individuals wanted to belong, to find a safe place to have fun and to be kids. Marlena for example, stated that she went to church to get out of her house. You may recall her as the one whose mother was prone to getting carried away when administering corporal punishment, to put it mildly. This was a community space where these people seemed to find validation and a break from the storms sometimes brewing at home. Masten (2009) identified factors that research suggests are promotive of resilience. One of the factors on her list was participation in organizations geared toward the development of positive social support. Communities that offer opportunities for networking and social capital building for families and children, and that affirm positive cultural values, principles, customs, associations and assistance have been found to promote resilience. For the participants in this study, church, particularly, Roman Catholic Church, was closely intertwined with the culture and thus impacted gender role expectations.

Two concepts, one more popular than the other, inevitably come up when discussing gender roles and Latinos. I described these earlier in the literature review.
They are *machismo* and *Marianismo* (Davis, 1973; Fitzpatrick, 1987; Rondón, 2002; Stycos, 1952) and they constitute the next high frequency theme for discussion under the “sun of community and culture.”

**Machismo and Marianismo.** Claudia’s grandfather sold his small farm to finance her uncle’s studies abroad, but he refused to allow her mother to go and stay in the capital city of San Juan to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse. Claudia explained that he wanted her mother to become a teacher because during that time, teachers did not marry. She said, “Teníamos dos tíos que fueron a estudiar medicina a México y a España. Se graduaron. Pero mi mamá tenía que hacer realmente todo lo que mi papá, mi abuelo yo le llamo mi papa, decidía. [We had two uncles who studied medicine in Mexico and Spain. They graduated. But my mother had to do really everything that my father, my grandfather, I call him my father, would decide.]”

When the time arrived for Claudia to go away to college, her grandfather tried to impose the same rules on her. She had been enamored with everything military for years and wanted to join the army, but the men in her family flatly refused to allow her to enlist. She rebelled, left home and moved to a big city in the U.S. where she worked in a factory. Eventually she returned home. Her grandfather gave in when she expressed that she wanted to go away to college and off she went to a town away from home. She later opted to pursue a teaching degree without her grandfather having to impose that career path on her. She said that although she did not think about it at the time, she honored his desire of having a daughter who became a teacher. Her mother never pursued studies beyond high school.
Marlena spoke of her brothers’ overprotection of her. “They go ‘No, not with my sister.’ They’ll tell them too. ‘Not with her. Mess with any, but not with her.’” This was similar to the beliefs held by Claudia’s grandfather who had her uncles serve as chaperones for her mother and afforded them the freedom to dictate whether or not Claudia would be allowed to pursue her military aspirations. Dalia described how the cultural gender role expectations impacted her formative years. “Papi [daddy] always was a firm believer that the man works, sustains the family, brings the paycheck. He puts the food on the table, pays the bills, that’s it.” Although her father did not take issue with the woman of the house stepping outside the home into the world of work, he taught his sons that “The man is the man of the house. They are to take care of the family.” Dalia’s mother decided that she wanted to prepare herself for financial independence from her husband. She did not want to have to depend on him for every need or want and she encouraged Dalia to become an independent woman. “I learned that from my mom, from a little, little girl, because of the family situation.”

In Dalia’s house the men took care of yard work and washing “la marquesina” [the carport]. The women did the housework. Dalia said, “We helped with laundry. We helped clean. Dalia shared that although looking back at her life during her childhood and adolescence she found that she and her sister almost fell into the role of the submissive female because that was the example that they had seen. Machismo was weaved into every day activities and behaviors. Expressing the thoughts of that time in her past she said, “So that was sort of, he’s the macho, and that’s a very typical thing in our culture.”

Elisa expressed it as her father being “chapado a la Antigua [old-fashioned]” when she spoke about his reluctance to let her go away to college. As we saw in the
literature review section, the cult of virginity, the unquestioned authority and freedom of the males in the family and the expectations for women experienced by the females in the sample relate to the concept of machismo and Marianismo (Rondón, 2003; Stevens, 1973; Stycos, 1952), but with an exception.

Even though the expectations were there for these females to be submissive, the females in this sample refused to subject themselves to what they considered unreasonable cultural expectations. Claudia, Julia, Viviana and Elisa each found a way to go away to college. Marlena returned to Puerto Rico by herself, and went to college there even though her parents were not happy with her decision. Viviana had had “a taste of freedom” when she went to stay in the college dorms as the grant she received was contingent on her taking up residence there. After that period, she returned to her mother’s house for a year. At age nineteen she decided to move out and take an apartment with some friends and her boyfriend. Her mother was devastated and told her that if she was going to move out of the house, she would be on her own. Viviana followed through with her plan even though her mother’s tears and upset feelings. She said that her mother cried as Viviana took her things out of the house. Her mother did not allow her to take her bedroom set telling her that she was on her own. If Viviana wanted independence she would have to find other furnishings for her new apartment. She told me that it was a hard pill to swallow. To Viviana, the value of gaining a sense of freedom superseded the cost. She said, “And so I had to really fend for myself and I got a job.”

Traditionally, a Puerto Rican mother sees her daughter away from home when she is safely deposited in the hands of the man who will now be her protector and provider. She does not expect her daughter to tell her that she will be moving out on her own and
especially not with a male. The cultural tradition is for women to remain virginal until marriage. This has changed for some women. Certainly most, if not all, of the women in the sample seemed to view traditional constraints on females as ludicrous. Viviana said that according to the cultural gender expectations that she grew up with, the woman was to make sure that the laundry was washed and folded; and the house clutter and dust free. She said, “Like God forbid that somebody comes unexpectedly and there’s like a crumb on the floor because you will have it.”

Viviana believed that the expectations for Puerto Rican women to coddle the men and to strive for domestic perfection were ridiculous. She said that in addition to contributing to the household income, Puerto Rican women were expected to, “At the same time make sure that you’re having everything set, ready for your husband. It’s very catered towards the man,” She spoke of how she had female relatives, one of them a cousin of the same age, who even during the era in which this study was conducted, lived out those traditional gender roles. She was clear on what was expected, but drew her own conclusions, perhaps based on her level of acculturation, that were diametrically opposed to her cultural legacy. She said that women at the time when this study was conducted were also family providers and thus expecting them to be the perfect homemakers was not fair. Viviana said, “My whole perception on this as a Puerto Rican is completely different. Now I think it’s 50-50.” Similarly, Julia had this to say about what she learned and saw regarding gender role expectations from her cultural lens.

The perfect Puerto Rican wife and mother is the one that is there for her children, there for her husband, there for their parents. It’s the one that always has the house clean, has the food ready, clothes are ironed, which I never iron ‘cause I
hate ironing. Everything has to be perfect. Everything has to be in a way that just everything flows. One thing flows with the other. Oh you have your kids, they’re properly dressed, nice and clean shoes are bright and those are things that I have seen in my family; that the perfect wife is the one that’s submissive to the husband and what the husband says that’s what goes. Like it or not, that’s what goes. Today I believe there’s been a big change.

Julia said that during the time when her interviews for this study took place there seemed to exist more of a balance in terms of gender role expectations for Puerto Rican men and women although she admitted that there are still Puerto Rican females who subscribe to the role of the submissive wife. She said, “We still have those I believe. I don’t know where, but probably in Puerto Rico. There are always women out there that are going to continue with that tradition of being submissive.” She believed that Puerto Rican traditional gender role expectations were still something that “we need to overcome.”

Most of the participants alluded to the sacrifices made by their mothers. The females expressed gratitude and love, but in most cases, not a desire to follow into their mothers’ footsteps. Marlena remembered having these feelings early on in her childhood. When Marlena was a little girl, she would see her mother doing all the housework and Marlena had to help her clean, fold clothes and cook. At that tender age Marlena decided, “I don’t want this. I wouldn’t like to be married and have all these kids. I can’t be doing this all my life.” As the only girl in her family, she was expected to help her mother while her brothers did not have to share the responsibility. Francis’s experience was a bit different because he had no sisters. His mother told Francis and his brother that because
she had no daughters, they would have to help with house chores such as dusting and washing dishes. He said, “Whatever it took, and my dad was very much in accordance to that.”

Francis seemed to view his experience with helping around the house as a way of discipline that later translated into self-discipline for him and his brother, however, Marlena grew up wanting her life to be different from the explicit and implicit cultural gender role expectations she was subjected to during her youth.

For the women in the sample the portrait of the submissive wife who was the picture of perfection was a myth to be dispelled and not a life goal worthy of aspiring to. Most of the males in the families of the female participants exhibited features of what a macho is supposed to be which landed their female counterparts in the role of the primary caregivers and martyrs by default. Nevertheless some of the fathers shared responsibilities like helping around the house or starting dinner for their children. For example, Emma’s father was able to get home from work just in time “to start dinner so that my mother wouldn’t have to cook.” Armando’s father also pitched in. Both of his parents worked outside the home. Armando said that there were no “defined rules” in terms of housework and childcare. Armando believed that witnessing the fluidity of gender roles taken on by his parents impacted his behavior and expectations within his marriage. He said, “I think that’s the reason my marriage is that way.”

The stronghold of cultural tradition did not seem to stand in the way of these fathers’ sense of there being something greater at stake than their macho persona. That was the survival of the family unit. Armando did mention some tasks that were reserved only for the males in the family and that I believe are not exclusive to the Puerto Rican
culture. For example, Armando said that his mother expected his father to take responsibility for things like fixing the family car, taking out the garbage, and mowing the lawn. His mother was the primary caregiver. Nevertheless responsibilities were shared on a needs basis. He said, “Taking care of us, mostly was done by my mother, but if he [Dad] had to do it, he did it.”

Francis, one of two brothers grew up with a father who was very authoritarian. Even though his mother taught her boys that their gender did not exempt them from helping out in the house, there were certain gender expectations to which they had to adhere. Francis related what he considered a sort of rite of passage into becoming a young man. It was marked by the day when his mother told him that he no longer had to greet his uncles with a kiss. She told Francis that a “good handshake” would suffice. He said, “So yeah, that was the beginning for also understanding that the girls could still kiss, whatever, but now the boys had to do something else.”

A macho in the traditional Puerto Rican culture did not kiss other men; even if they were his uncles, fathers, grandfathers or the like. Along the same lines, boys had traditionally been discouraged from publicly displaying emotion. Ricardo’s grandfather put it in terms that a little boy could understand. Ricardo’s mother had just given birth to a baby boy. Because of their inability to access adequate health care, the delivery was assisted by a local midwife at their home and the baby, who was born with pulmonary complications, died within two days. Ricardo was about five years old. He cried. His grandfather convinced him to stop. He told Ricardo that if he cried, the baby who was now an angel would never get his wings. Ricardo said, “But that’s his idea of saying, helping us cope with the situation, ‘You don’t cry because…’ but that’s Latino talk
Como el cantar del coquí

sometimes.” Ricardo’s father was not so subtle in expressing the expectation that as a boy, Ricardo was to be tough and refrain from crying. Ricardo said that Puerto Rican men were frequently afraid to display their emotions. He said, “My father was the type of person that would say, and that comes culturally anyway, ‘Boys don’t cry and you’d better learn to put on a strong face, regardless of what life throws at you. So deal with it.” Ricardo told me that he was raised to keep his emotions hidden. He said, “You don’t show your emotions. You hold back, and when you learn that from a very young age, it’s kind of hard to make changes.”

Marlena too felt the influence of the cultural belief that boys do not have or show feelings. She explained her reluctance to externalize emotions by stating that she grew up with boys and “so a lot of times I don’t show feelings.” She believed that anyone familiar with the Latino culture would know that it was not acceptable for males to show emotional vulnerability. “Boys don’t have feelings, so I learned to hide my feelings too. I cry just like everybody else. It’s just I hold it more than what another female would and it’s because I was raised with boys.”

Elisa stated that culturally, Puerto Rican males who were real men were chivalrous and courteous which she seemed to consider endearing qualities. She posed that boys learned from their mothers, things that they should and should not do for and to women. Showing courtesy by opening doors for women and not laying hands on women with the intent to harm them were two things that Elisa believed Puerto Rican mothers taught their boys from a young age. She posed that although Puerto Rican men were traditionally “machistas y mandones [male chauvinists and bossy]” they would not strike
women. With nostalgia she said, “Esas cosas como que se han perdido con el tiempo. [These things sort of have been lost with time.]”

Elisa lamented that today; young Latino males do not seem to be learning about those expectations. This was quite interesting as the research has linked the physical abuse of women to the concept of machismo. Stycos (1952), Suárez-Findley (1999), and more recently, Rondón (2003), wrote about the plight of the woman imprisoned by the bastion of machismo. This is where the concept of Marianismo comes in. Women as the primary caregivers of their sons traditionally taught them about the respect for women and about chivalry. Meanwhile, Rondón said, they positioned themselves as the ultimate woman in any Puerto Rican man’s life. The mother was akin to the Virgin Mary and thus deserved the respect and veneration of her offspring.

The participants in this study frequently used the term sacrifice when talking about their mothers. This seems to indicate that they somewhat view their mothers as martyrs. Perhaps this is where an answer can be found as to why some described their mothers as strong even when they might have been victims of domestic violence or had not stood up to their husbands for years of sexual indiscretions and neglect. There was an air of martyrdom that seemed to permeate in the stories regarding the mothers. Although martyrs are victimized, from a religious perspective, we do not see them as helpless. Otherwise, why would people pray to them for help? It is he or she, the martyr, who chooses to answer the calling and stoically accept the sacrifices that accompany that choice. He or she has a higher purpose, the greater good. Just like the participants’ mothers who in Ricardo’s words, “kept it together” for their children. This is where I believe, a comparison between a martyr’s and the mothers’ strength makes sense. As
suggested by research (Davis, 1973; Stycos, 1952; Suárez-Findley, 1999), this position of
distinction and place of honor afforded to mothers, was traditionally instilled in children
by their mothers and for the males, counteracted by the expectations set forth by the
tradition of machismo.

The females in this sample saw how gender role differences imposed by cultural
standards dictated that they would have access to less freedom than their male
counterparts. These females rebelled and made their own path many times emotionally
inconveniencing parents and that is to say the least. They stood up for their needs and
beliefs while still loving their mothers and in most cases, their fathers. An interesting
finding in this sample was that the males’ mothers assigned them tasks conventionally
exercised by females. Babysitting, dusting, doing dishes and such were not things that
one would usually find a Puerto Rican macho man doing. These men’s fathers had at
some point in their lives done these things and at least two out of three supported their
sons’ helping out around the house. One of the fathers, Ricardo’s, was not there to
support or veto his sons’ engagement in helping with housekeeping tasks.

**Cultural pride and race.** The participants in this study spoke of cultural pride.
For this sample, race seemed to be closely related to their cultural pride. Most of the
participants made reference to race in the context of their cultural identity and
experiences. Marlena said that her parents never talked to her about race differences other
than to say that she should never deny her roots and that she should be accepting of
others. She said, “That’s something we were taught. We’re proud of what we are and who
we are, and we’re Puerto Ricans.” Marlena’s parents taught their children to never be
embarrassed about their ethnicity. She remembered her brother having the Puerto Rican flag engraved on his graduation ring. She said that for her parents, developing cultural pride in Marlena and her brothers “was a big thing.” Marlena’s parents also insisted that she and her brothers treat others with dignity and fairness. Her neighbors in the projects were of a variety of races and her parents never taught her to discriminate against anyone based on racial, cultural or linguistic differences. Marlena said, “We would all get along.” She believed that because she was not taught to think of others in terms of color, as a child she did not find herself placing people in categories such as “Hispanic, Black or White” She said, “I didn’t see people as colors. I would play with everybody.” This outlook would remain the same for Marlena “until I went to junior high school.”

Marlena’s parents had decided to move back to Puerto Rico because of the desegregation law that imposed racial quotas for schools resulting in her having to travel across town on a bus to her assigned school. Her parents feared for her safety and thought it best to move back to Puerto Rico. Once there, her new community became the context in which Marlena’s language and pale skin color became an issue. She began to experience rejection and teasing from neighborhood kids who frequently called her, “piernas de Yuca [yuca legs]” (Yuca is an indigenous root vegetable popular in Puerto Rican cuisine. It has a hard brown peel that is removed before preparing it for consumption which reveals its white color). Adjustment to her new surroundings became hard to come by for Marlena, yet not impossible.

Julia recalled her first encounter with a prejudicial remark while walking home from school on a day when her father was not there to pick her up from school. She was a child and she was living in a U.S. city. She said, “I remember this little boy calling me a
Como el cantar del coquí

spic. I didn’t know what spic meant.” Julia’s father had never spoken that word to her. Her father had “a little grocery store” at that time, whose patronage included people of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Julia had grown accustomed to seeing all of them respectfully interacting with each other. She said, “I never knew of discrimination then until I was in school.” From her first experience with that pejorative word, she learned about ethnic prejudice. She said, “So I did feel that, because of me being Hispanic that was like, ‘What are you doing here? Spics don’t come in with the White people.’ So that for me was a shock at a young age.”

Contrary to Marlena, when Julia moved back to Puerto Rico she was accepted into her new community. The fact that she had come from the U.S. and spoke English only added to her appeal as the new kid in town. She said, “But when I went to Puerto Rico, no, everybody, ‘Oh, she’s knows English. Okay, come on, help us out.’ So it was a great acceptance.”

Cultural pride oozed out of the pores of the participants in this study. Their collections of photographs as well as their statements, suggested that they were proud of being Puerto Rican and that that cultural pride in their esteem, had been important to their resilience. Their classrooms, office spaces and homes had artifacts, pictures and other things that told one that they were indeed proud of their Puerto Rican cultural heritage. Ricardo walked into our first interview with a small patch of a Puerto Rican flag in his hand that he had brought with him from Puerto Rico over three decades ago when he was just an adolescent. He pulled out the somewhat faded and tattered flag and proceeded to tell me that when he left Puerto Rico he had brought that flag with him, “so I wouldn’t forget my roots.” Ricardo said that, “Sometimes we come over here and we have a
tendency to forget where we’re coming from.” He strongly believed that “In order for you to know where you’re going you have to know where you’re coming from because if not, you lose track.”

Ricardo held the old flag in his hands and observed that it was “falling apart.” He said that he used the flag as his foundation. It represented his connection to the Island and to his cultural pride. He said, “People can put us down. People can just talk about [us] not being from the United States or whatever,” but he stated knowing who he was “regardless of what other people say they cannot take that away from me. I’m proud of where I’m coming from. I’m proud of what I have done, and basically that’s what helped me.”

That flag represented so much more to Ricardo than a souvenir from the place that witnessed his arrival into this world. That article and a ring of an Indian head that his father gave him resurfaced during the second interview and were the objects of two of his pictures. He said,

Again, it’s the flag and when I left my country my father left me a ring. It’s an Indian head. I asked him, “Why an Indian head? What does it mean? What does it mean to you?” And he said, “Well, yeah, we’re not Indians, we’re not Native Americans however we are, we are like a stew.” Like they say basically when you look at Puerto Ricans, it’s got a little bit of everything into it. We are White. We are Black. We are Indians, American-Indians.

Marlena and Emma also spoke about the mix of races among Puerto Ricans. Carmen recalls having been told that she was, “too white to be Puerto Rican” because the person assumed that Puerto Ricans were all of a dark skin color. These people were aware of their history as a culture and expressed deep pride in their roots. After moving
to Puerto Rico, Emma recalled other people at her place of work telling her “Yankee go home” and then asking her to assist when a call came in from someone who only spoke English. It seems that the experiences of the participants fluctuated from positive to negative, based on the context within which they took place, and not one was exclusively negative or positive. Whether positive, negative, or apparently neutral, these experiences were etched in the participants’ memories, suggesting that they struck an emotional chord. Striking as they may have been, these participants moved on, garnering lessons along the way, while not letting them chip away at their self-concept even when they at times had been arbitrarily assigned a cultural identity and religious affiliation.

Francis was working in retail and one of the customers inquired about his ethnic background. Francis told Mr. Moses that his parents were Puerto Rican. The gentleman expressed disbelief and proceeded to ask Francis which tribe he belonged to. Once Francis clarified that he did not belong to a tribe. The man then assumed that Francis was Catholic. Francis felt offended by his customer’s assumptions, but opted to turn the occasion into a teachable moment and sprinkle in some humor. He said, “You know we had a brief conversation and so then holding his card I said ‘Now remember Jesus saves, but Moses invests.’”

Different reactions and different approaches across the participants all found their arrival point at the reaffirmation of their cultural identity and the understanding that in most of the cases, malice on the part of the other may not have been the source of the discrimination. The findings here suggest that the participants viewed ignorance and lack of information as the culprits yielding the insensitive remarks that members of the dominant and other cultures threw in their direction. One thing remains constant and that
is that there seems to be agreement regarding the relevance that the participants assigned to their cultural identity in terms of their resilience. Based on their descriptions regarding their culture, they related their cultural roots to the inner strength that had allowed them to overcome adversity.

**Language: “I am my accent”**. Carmen called the English language “the last bastion.” I asked what she meant by that statement and this is what she said that dealing with English language acquisition had represented a struggle for her. Carmen spoke English with marked accentual tones. She recognized that she needed to slow down her speech so that she would be able to effectively pronounce the endings of words. Carmen believed that engaging in the usage of the English language helped her improve daily. She reflected on what may have caused her difficulties with learning English and concluded that language was for her, intimately related to her Puerto Rican cultural identity. She said, “It’s this other part of who I was very Puerto Rican. A Puerto Rican nationalist at heart, she had “never in my wildest dreams imagined that I was going to come live in this country.”

Carmen’s thoughts seemed reminiscent of the sentiment expressed by Anzaldúa (2004) when she wrote about a person’s native language being such an integral part of who she is. Carmen viewed adopting English as an antithesis to her native Spanish language as she sensed pressure from what she viewed as the linguistic hegemony prevalent in the U.S. Language for her had been the last tangible thread linking her to her ethnic self as a Puerto Rican and one that she, like the others in the sample were not willing to cut away from. This may have come as a result of the history of American
dominance and colonial underpinnings tied to English language acquisition in Puerto Rico that Clachar (1997) wrote about and that Souto-Manning (2006) suggested translated into an educational system that enforces the cultural hegemony of the dominant power without taking into account the dignity of the people that it is supposed to serve. This is not to mean that the participants in this study were opposed to learning English or improving their English skills, but they wanted to maintain their vernacular tongue as it was an inseparable part of who they were. Two of the participants did their interviews completely in Spanish and the rest of them used at the very least some Spanish phrases during the process.

The participants in this study spoke extensively about experiences regarding language and ethnic discrimination and how under the “sun of community and culture” they continued to face rejection. For example, Elisa said that her accent was something that she would die with. When she went to an interview for a job in another state, the interviewer’s words were so discouraging that she walked out of the man’s office feeling “traumatizada [traumatized],” fearing having to speak English again. The African-American interviewer had told her that her English was so substandard that she had no chance of getting a job in the U.S. Her discouragement had a short lifespan because her determination to make it in this country drove her to continue trying until she reached her goal of getting a teaching job. Some positive self-talk and the willingness to learn from her mistakes helped Elisa achieve her dream of teaching in the U.S. She decided that she would speak the language whether or not others had difficulty understanding her. She said, “Yo tengo que hablar en inglés. Yo tengo que sobrevivir en este país. Yo hablo y si no me entienden, no me entienden. Lo que tengo que hacer es tratar de arreglar las cosas
Como el cantar del coquí 174

*que pronuncio mal.* [I have to speak English. I have to survive in this country. I speak and if they don’t understand me then they don’t and all I have to do is try to fix the things that I mispronounce.]

Elisa decided that she would not let a put-down discourage her. Instead of beating herself up about her lack of expressive English skills, she accepted the challenge of everyday working towards the improvement of her conversational English skills. She obtained her master’s degree in a U.S. university and at the time of this study was identified in her district as a highly qualified teacher. Had Elisa followed her interviewer’s advice, it seems unlikely that she would have come as far as she had in the U.S. Ricardo too faced ridicule, for his language many times in his life. Ricardo even experienced ridicule at the hands of other Latinos. He described it thus:

There were times when people used to laugh because [of] my accent. Sometimes, what you say and what comes out is totally different, and the fact that sometimes you think in one language and you speak in a different language, that doesn’t make it easy. So I remember one time a person started laughing because I said a comment. Instead of saying Hi-Fi, I said “He-Fee,” because I read it in Spanish, and boy did I really, they got on my case and I said “Okay, fine, you know,” and the persons that were laughing at me, I saw them a few years later and they were still working in the same crummy job that they had and they still barely know the language.

Neither Ricardo nor Elisa allowed ridicule to discourage them from trying. Even when mistakes happened they pressed on and with great results. The group of men who laughed at Ricardo may have won one over him in knowing how to correctly pronounce
hi-fi, but Ricardo surpassed them in English language skills development and in earning potential. It certainly seems like a good thing that intergroup identification for Ricardo did not seem to take precedence when his personal success was at stake.

Although Ricardo’s experience involved other Latinos, most of the stories of language and rejection stemmed from cross-cultural interactions. Claudia was at a local activity seeking to have a few hours of entertainment, relaxation and fellowship when she made a comment and one of the women at the activity chastised her for speaking in Spanish. The stranger told Claudia that because people like her spoke in their language it made it hard for the woman to understand them. Claudia found her remark somewhat funny because she had not made her comment in Spanish. She said, “Yo estaba hablando inglés. [I was speaking English.]” Claudia felt deeply offended by the woman’s remark and told the woman that in the first place she was not talking with her. Claudia added that she was Puerto Rican and not an immigrant. She told the lady that if per chance she was referring to immigrants, “well then tell your family to go back to their country because this country was formed by immigrants.” Moments later the woman apologized. Claudia graciously accepted. She said, “There’s no problem. Maybe I speak with an accent but it doesn’t mean that I am thinking with an accent. I am an educated person. Because I am Puerto Rican, we are a part of the United States.”

Claudia used this incident as an opportunity to inform and educate. She was offended by what the woman said, but she asserted her position as a citizen of the U.S. and as a proud Puerto Rican woman. Others made comments about similar situations. For example, Carolina shared the following story:
You know that sometimes people say, “Go back to your country. Where’s your green card?” That sort of situation, or you’re not allowed to speak your language. Like I was once told by this woman who looked like she was from German descent or something like that. She heard my family and I were talking in Spanish and she said, “You’re in America! Speak American!” “Is she talking to me?” and she persisted. So I just said, and I lost it and I should not have, “First of all, it’s not American. It’s English and what I’m saying is none of your business.” It was at a store. I called for security and made a big issue about it. I should’ve remained calm. Ethnicity, they look at you sometimes in my case, “Oh you’re White.” And you open your mouth; some people say I speak with an accent. Some people say they don’t pick up on it. There are problems. There are issues. Maybe not as badly as with other cultures or races, but we do have some problems. We do. Anybody that says no, they’re lying.

Carolina’s reaction may have seemed too passionate even to her, but the anger seems justified as at the time of this study this was still a frequent occurrence. Note that Carolina was at a commercial establishment speaking with her family and did not know the woman in question. Her conversation was not with or about the woman whose presence she noticed only after she addressed Carolina suggesting that she stop speaking Spanish. As a natural born citizen of the U.S., Carolina felt offended and acted in defense of her constitutional right to freedom of speech. She stated that although she “had nothing to do with Puerto Rico becoming a territory of the U.S.,” we, are American citizens. Carolina said, “I know who I am. I know what I am. I don’t care what anybody thinks or says.”
The data suggest that the participants’ experiences with discrimination had served to tighten their grip on their cultural pride, language, and values. Again, the findings seem consistent with Ward et al.’s (2001) conclusions that for Latinos, inter-group identification seems to be strengthened as a result of discrimination from the dominant cultural group. Regarding this Armando said experiences with discrimination just reaffirmed his cultural identity and the use of his vernacular, “Just because I feel that someone’s trying to take it away.” When his cultural identity was threatened by way of the rejection of his native language, Armando said that it just made him hold on tighter to his vernacular tongue. He explained that when it came to someone trying to take away his right to speak in Spanish, “I’m going to do it twice as hard just because you’re telling me not to.” He added that it also depended on how a native speaker of English expressed his or her need to understand what was being said. Armando said that when people have approached him with a sincere interest in understanding the language, he had been willing to teach and inform the individual posing the question. He said that despite the hurt feelings and anger that discrimination could cause, “I thank God every day for those experiences because I think that they’ve made me the person that I am today.” Armando, much like the other participants in this study, saw his experiences with discrimination as opportunities for growth and the reaffirmation of his cultural pride.

Listen to how Francis handled a situation where another man tried to mock his name, possibly led by his cultural biases and stereotypes. It had been a month since Francis had arrived in a new city when he was invited to a cocktail party. He attended the party and found himself having a great time there. He said, “Of course there’s always at least one, you know you would say for lack [of a better word], a jerk.” The man who
Francis referred to as a “jerk” decided that it would be entertaining to make fun of Francis’s name and cultural background. He said, “Francis, what kind of an American name is that?” Although the man’s question upset Francis, he remained calm and decided to remind the man of the history of the U.S. and said, “Gosh, I don’t know. It’s as American as Iroquois, Choctaw, Apache, Cheyenne, Blackfoot,” and then mentioned a few more Native American Indian tribes. The man, oblivious to the point that Francis was trying to make asked, “Oh, so you’re Native American?” At that point Francis opted to end the interaction with a humorous remark and move on considering the man too ignorant to warrant any more of his energy. He said to the man, “Well I was born in [City] and you know America considers [City] a whole different country.” Francis said that after that they each gravitated toward different parts of the room, but that he felt that he had a least conveyed that what the other party guest thought would be funny, had been no laughing matter to him.

Carmen’s statement of Puerto Rican ethnicity very eloquently summarizes what other participants spoke about. Carmen wrote the following:

I did not know about my ethnic self until I moved into this country. Once, I became a Puerto Rican living in the United States, this label became part of my reality. Then, I begin to view ethnicity as individual and communal. Consequently, *Puertorriqueñidad* [Puerto Rican ethnicity] is more than a static textual and discursive presentation, or an implication of a foreign national origin, or a set of beliefs, and values of a group of people “outside” the mainstream. Puerto Rican ethnicity entices gestures, ways of communication, words of endearment, food, music, clothes, culture, language, and a sense of belonging and
community making. *Puertorriqueñidad* is evocative, passionate, something that refuses to die! It resides in the borderlands of race, culture and language. It resides within the seams of colonization, imperialism, a second-class citizenship, and deficient and incomplete bilingualism. It serves as a witness to our cultural and linguistic determination. Yes, I am a *Boricua* [Puerto Rican]. I am a Puerto Rican woman, a native Spanish and non-native English speaker, marked-linguistic accentual, a mother of many, a teacher, a student, a cultural foreigner, a legal citizen, white and/or non-white depending upon my geographical and/or ideological location. I am a Latina or Hispanic depending upon your political maturation. You see Puertorriqueñidad weaves the African, the Spaniard, and the Taíno in me! It allows these forces to dance and cohabit in the battlegrounds of my imagination. It embraces and seduces my senses. It guides my actions and everyday practices. It defines who I am and who I am not. It is a symbol of pride, a national identifier, a birthright which guides and shapes my actions, thoughts, aspirations, feelings, expectations, ways of acting and understanding the world, relating to others, expressiveness, communication, social relations, and cognition. *Puertorriqueñidad* is part of me and just the thought that I could depart from it is horrifying since I have never considered being anything else. Puerto Rican I was born and as a Puerto Rican I will die. *Sí, yo soy Puertorriqueña* . [Yes, I am Puerto Rican.]

The participants in this study expressed that they believed that ignorance and fear of the unknown were largely responsible for discriminatory attitudes and practices against Puerto Ricans. They spoke of mainstream society’s arrogance that seemed to
view us as second class citizens unworthy of the rights protected by the U.S. constitution. It is noteworthy that the experiences with discrimination were not exclusively with Caucasian-Americans. They claimed frequently finding themselves in a position to educate others regarding who Puerto Ricans were and what they were not. Armando added that in his experience “green cards” and getting “back on the boat” were the first things that people thought about when they heard the words Puerto Rican. In his estimation, many people were lacking in knowledge regarding Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States. He said, “Puerto Ricans are born citizens of the United States because Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States.” He added that discriminatory attitudes and practices against Puerto Ricans emerged from “ignorance and people not being educated about” cultural diversity. Armando said, “They automatically think, ‘He’s uneducated, he’s an Indian. He’s used to climbing palm trees, dropping coconuts.’ They feel that just people in this country are educated and unfortunately, [for them] that’s just not the way it is.”

Some had encountered unscrupulous business people trying to take advantage of them because of the language. Claudia told of a time when she had bought a new car. After she had signed the contract, taken the car home, and finalized everything with the bank, the dealership contacted her to tell her that they had charged her less than they should have for the vehicle and that she needed to come in and sign a new sales contract. She checked with the bank and then contacted an attorney who sent them a letter. Needless to say, the dealership backed off. Clearly something was wrong with their proposition and Claudia felt that her ethnicity and her accent had something to do with it.
Like all the others, Claudia found a way to inform and educate and assert her position as an educated woman.

Marlena described how language had been a source of discrimination for her and her family. Marlena reported that throughout her life all she had to do was say a few words for language-based discrimination to find her. The color of her skin had not been a problem for her in the U.S. because Marlena could pass for Caucasian, but her accent was undeniably Latino. She, like the others, stated that people’s assumptions about her educational level based on her spoken English had resulted in unfair treatment for her family at a local bank. She said, “They didn’t treat us very well because of our language I guess. They thought that we were uneducated.” Marlena and her husband both possessed graduate degrees at the time of the bank incident and that would not be the last time that she would experience discrimination at a place of business. Consider the following story.

Marlena’s brother aimed to teach a salesperson a lesson that he would not soon forget. It was Marlena’s brother’s day off and he asked her to accompany him automobile shopping. He was casually dressed, wearing a t-shirt and shorts. Marlena wore work clothes, as she had been to work that day. They looked at the cars and inquired with a salesman. The car salesman in Marlena’s story acted as if she and her brother were inconveniencing him by looking at cars for sale in his dealership. At least to Marlena it seemed like, “He treated us like if we were wasting his time because [he thought] we were not going buy a car. He thought that we probably didn’t have good credit because we were Hispanic.”

Marlena thought it might have been somewhat mean of her brother to have the man run the credit check and write up the contract only to say to him that he was not
going to go through with the deal. The salesman had come back to them with a more customer friendly attitude once the credit check had been completed, and Marlena’s brother had been approved. Marlena’s bother told the salesman his reason for not completing the purchase. “I am not buying it because of the way you treated me. I just wanted you to know that we had good credit and just because we’re Hispanic [that] doesn’t mean that you have to treat us unfairly.” The siblings walked out of the dealership leaving the salesman behind in disbelief.

If that salesman had known that Marlena’s brother was a businessman who happened to be pretty successful, he might have treated him differently despite his ethnicity. Marlena proudly shared this story with the moral of it being that one should not make assumptions about people based on stereotypes. This Marlena cited as the “ignorance of people.” According to Dalia, this same brand of ignorance precluded her accessibility to healthcare insurance for her children after her divorce.

Dalia was a divorced mother of three. She was finishing college and working at the same time. Healthcare costs had risen and she needed help. She visited a government office to apply for assistance in providing her children with the healthcare insurance that she could not afford. She was told that she was making too much money when they factored in her old car. In order to get help she was told that she had to sell it. “I said ‘How can I sell my car when that is my means of transportation to go work so that I could put food on the table and take care of my kids?’” Her vehicle, an old Subaru, was her only material possession that was of any value. Additionally it was her only means of transportation. Dalia concluded that she was denied the assistance because of her ethnicity. She said, “It was discrimination. I was dark. I had a slight accent I saw it.
Anybody could see it. I had another friend with me, she saw it, and she is a native from here.” Dalia knew that her suspicions were hard to prove and so she decided to consider the experience a lesson learned and do the best with what she had. She said, “So I had to be resourceful and go a different route.”

Again, when in the presence of discrimination they seemed to become even more resolute in their dreams. They did not give up and they seemed to seek in these events the lesson or lessons that may be hidden there. Not once did I hear these participants say that they gave up because discrimination was something that they could not or did not know how to handle. They wrote statements that illustrated the cultural pride that they believed had been instrumental to their resilience. The participants in this study were aware of Puerto Rico’s history as what Trías-Monge (1997) called the “oldest colony in the modern world” (p.4). Most if not all spoke proudly about the Puerto Rican culture having emerged as a result of the intermixing of the Taíno, Spanish, and African cultures.

Taínos were the native people who occupied the Island when Columbus set foot on its shores. Spanish colonizers arrived and used evangelization as their justification to enslave the Taíno Indians. The Taíno population greatly diminished and soon perished. The Spanish then brought African slaves to the Island (Trías-Monge). These three races intermixed providing the foundation for the variety of phenotypes that can be seen among Puerto Ricans, visible even in the relatively small number of participants in this study.

For example, Carmen and Carolina both mentioned being regarded as too White to be Puerto Rican. The reader may recall that Dalia believed she had been discriminated against in a U.S. government office because “I was dark.” Marlena and Ricardo had each been mistaken for Italian and, or Arabic among other ethnic groups. I found that
regardless of their phenotype every single participant was very proud of his or her ethnic roots. For example, Elisa’s background in biology seemed to spill into her description of what being Puerto Rican meant to her. She said, “My Puerto Rican heritage is my pride, as it is in my genes. As a Puerto Rican, I'm a mix of many races and when that happens, we have variations, and variations make me stronger.” Claudia said that wherever she went she would continue to take pride in her cultural identity that “me identifica como boricua de pura sepa y como el coquí, único en el mundo. [identifies me as a die-hard Puerto Rican, and like the coquí, unique in the world.]”

Julia said she took pride in “coming from a heritage that is so rich in various cultures.” Emma added that “We are culturally rich because we are composed of three cultures, Spain, African and Taíno. Most of the participants saw their ethnic background as an asset in relating to people of diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, regarding her cultural background Emma said, “This is what I feel, has helped me to get along with my students from other parts of the world.” Along the same lines Marlena added, “I am proud of sharing my culture and experiences with others.” Claudia said, “Como personas somos hospitalarias con todas las culturas que conocemos en nuestras vidas. [As a people, we are hospitable with all the cultures we meet during our lifespan.]”

The individuals who participated in this study seemed to find a source of resilience in their cultural pride. Ricardo said, “It's who I am and the force that keeps me going. I have to accept where I'm coming from, but only I dictate where I'm going.” Ethnic pride for Ricardo seemed to be intimately related to acceptance. He believed that there was beauty in his cultural heritage and he set out to “make it better.” Francis’s words seemed to complete Ricardo’s line of thought as we can view them as the answer
to what “making it better” may mean. Francis said that his Puerto Rican heritage had been for him, “a resource to use as a defense mechanism or as an ego strengthener.” He suggested that a Puerto Rican person’s internalization of the meaning of his or her cultural heritage led to the creation of, “quite the polite, respectful, intuitive as well as honestly tactful individual. You know what some would just reduce to ‘class.’”

They spoke of the qualities that they considered identified them as a people. Carolina said, “The language, the food, the customs,” were the foundations of who she was. Claudia spoke of the “tradiciones llenas de sabores y ritmos tropicales. Nos encanta festejar por cualquier motivo. [traditions filled with tropical flavors and rhythms. We love to party for any reason.]” Dalia confirmed much of what the others claimed when she said, “We are strong and proud people: People with a strong sense of family values, education, talent and good will. We are happy, hospitable and very caring individuals who want what is best for our children and community.” She too alluded to the coqui as an icon representative of Puerto Ricans. She said, “Our people may be like the coqui, [that] may find it hard to adapt to being outside its environment but they will never give up. It is all about attitude!”

Yes, from the stories of the participants I gathered that a positive attitude seemed to be paramount to their resilience. Rather than finding fault with the hand that they were dealt in terms of their cultural heritage, the participants in this study used their knowledge of their history and ethnic roots as a source of personal strength and a resource to dispel stereotypes when they encountered ignorance personified along their way. For example, Julia said that in her experience, “Not many people see all the obstacles we have to go through in order to achieve something. Many people think that just because we come
from a Hispanic background we cannot become a successful professional.” She added that dominant culture stereotypes regarding the capacity of Latinos to excel can be equally found in the workplace. She said, “Many times I feel other professionals judge us for the mistakes of others and that [they think] we are not smart enough.” She suggested that dispelling stereotypes was a daily struggle for Puerto Ricans in the Diaspora.

As you can see, for the participants in this study being Puerto Rican represented values that they cherished. Hospitality, optimism, diversity, goodwill, the value of education, and family values are just a few of the things that made them who they were. These values, in their estimation, had acted as factors that were promotive of their resilience. Having a clear sense of their Puerto Rican identity and being able to affirm and maintain it constituted strength according to the participants in this study. The findings here seem to concur with Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff’s (2007) findings which suggested the existence of a positive correlation between ethnic identity exploration and resolution, and self esteem.

Negative experiences had only served to reaffirm their cultural pride and their sense of cultural identity. They defended their status as American citizens and their identity as Puerto Ricans. Ward et al., (2001) wrote about a sort of self-preservation mechanism that that kicks in as a result of discrimination and that allows the non-dominant group to assert and protect their group’s identity in the presence of the dominant culture. The findings here concur. These participants as a group view themselves as able to relate to people of different racial backgrounds by virtue of the mix of races that resulted in today’s Puerto Ricans. Consistent with Landale and Oropesa, (2002) they did not self-identify in terms of skin color based on the classifications
imposed by U.S. dominant social standards. They departed from a socioracial perspective that seemed consistent with the concept of sociorace as defined by Helms and Talleyrand (1997). Some of the participants’ stories about prejudice based on color and or on language differences were particularly poignant because they seemed to point to what Helms (1993) called the pre-encounter and the encounter stages of racial identity. As mentioned earlier in this work, although these terms belong to Helms’s Black Racial Identity Theory, I believe they apply to this work. Some of the negative experiences that the participants had with discrimination happened under the sun of school, the reader will find those stories under that title.

The “Sun of School”

This seems like a perfect time to revisit Piirto’s (2002a) statement regarding the “sun of school.” This “sun” may be viewed as having the potential to be a saving grace when the rays of other “suns” have been obscured by clouds. The power to rescue the person in from the cold resides in this “sun.” I think that this “sun” even more so than the other major suns, seems to be of a dichotomous nature in that it has the potential to leave one in a desolate world if it fails to shine brightly when it is most needed. Under this “sun” some of the participants had experiences that shook them and shocked them. We will look at those first, even though they offer a not so nice picture of an educational system that frequently insists on viewing language and racial minorities as a lesser bunch (Rodriguez, 1974; Souto-Manning, 2006). The subsequent experiences which seemed to ameliorate the damage that the participants felt or believed, was done to them at one time.
became the place where hope awaited these men and women. Like a person who gets sun-burned once tends to go out in the sunlight again, these individuals did not run away from the environment of the “sun of school” and found as Francis said, that “Education will get you in some nice places.”

For the participants in this study, “the sun of school” highlighted possibilities that they might have been otherwise missed. Under it, relationships with teachers flourished, providing the guidance and support needed to make it through some of the hardest experiences of their lives. The power of this “sun” continued to fuel their hope and motivation well beyond their formative years. In spite of clouds sometimes stepping in leaving some of these individuals feeling the cold touch of rejection, positive experiences in school seemed to override the risks making the “sun of school” a safe and warm place to be. These are some of their stories.

**Clouds of rejection and the rays of acceptance.** Separating rejection and acceptance under the sun of school represents a difficult task. One would have to take the stories so far out of order that the participants’ voices could be drowned out by the readers’ thought process of trying to make sense of the stories’ chronology. In keeping with my commitment to allow their voices to speak loudly and clearly, I have opted to combine these two themes as I believe that one represents the flipside of the other. This section contains stories filled with hits and misses of educators who touched the lives of my participants. Let us begin.

Carolina had been a good student who had excelled, especially in her science courses and had participated in extracurricular activities. She said, “The public school
system would teach kids to play instruments, and I played the piano.” For Carolina, rejection in school would appear after school authorities found out that she was pregnant. They immediately asked her to leave. She had been a young bride who was married in the Catholic Church. She was not pregnant at the time of her nuptials. Nevertheless, when she did get pregnant and it started to show, she was called into the principal’s office and dismissed as an unwanted presence in the school “because I was not a good role model for the female students.” Carolina did not give up on her goal to finish high school. Even though she was rendered unable to complete it in the traditional manner, she took the only path available to her and later became the first person in her family to obtain a master’s degree.

Marlena self reported as a quiet girl when she was a young student. One year she had a teacher, who, no matter what Marlena did, would constantly yell at her. One day Marlena had had enough and she lashed out. “I told her I was tired and that she could just go straight to hell, and of course you know I got suspended and I was whooped.” Her lashing out had consequences. Her mother had set the expectation for Marlena to respect teachers no matter what. Still Marlena felt that the teacher’s behavior toward her was unmerited and therefore Marlena did not regret taking a stand in her own defense. She said, “I think it’s because I was the only Hispanic in that classroom. I always felt that.”

Marlena expressed that although she was a quiet and shy little girl, her brothers’ reputation preceded her, leaving school personnel to judge her based on her relatives’ behavior and not her own. In addition to her feeling that her ethnicity was the reason the teacher treated her unfairly, she cited her being a Second Language Learner (SLL) as another source of rejection. Her cultural pride seemed to come to the rescue like that
extra jacket or throw one may pack for travel to an unknown climate. She said, “They didn’t know what I was. They didn’t know if I was a Puerto Rican or an Italian or even Arabic. . . So that was kind of tough, but I’m proud of what I am.”

She held to her cultural pride to help her navigate those difficult times. She did have pleasant memories of her first school years, memories that stood out for her and that she still cherished—a teacher taking the time to calm an anxious child, Santa Claus coming to school, and cupcake parties—became memories with which she never parted. She remembered kindergarten vividly. Like most children, she was “really, really scared.” Marlena recalled her teacher as an older woman who played the piano to calm Marlena down.

Marlena’s decision to pursue a teaching degree was the result of a conversation with an encouraging teacher. She stated that, “I decided to do teaching because I had a teacher from high school that told me I would’ve been a good English teacher and they needed them, and that’s why I did it.” The relevance of encouraging teachers in the lives of these resiliants surfaced over and over as they recounted times or events in their young lives.

Dalia was a little girl when her parents decided to move back to Puerto Rico. There was tension at home, because her mother and father were heading in the direction of the first of three divorces. An observant and loving teacher made a difference for a little girl whose grades were on a downward spiral. The following story illustrates how her teacher made an enormous difference in Dalia’s life. I hope that any educator reading this story may see in it a practical example of the help that an educator can offer to a
child in need of support and a safe place to express his or her fears about a world that they have no control over.

Dalia’s parents’ divorce came as “a big surprise.” She stated the belief that no child would want his or her parents to separate, and added that she had to endure the same ordeal three times. She recalled those experiences as “very sad” and “shocking.”

She had arrived in Puerto Rico at age four and by the time she entered kindergarten her parents were “having difficulties.” Dalia told me about a first grade teacher who made an enormous difference in her life. As a young girl, Dalia had sensed sadness in her home. She said, “I really didn’t understand, but I knew that there was some sadness, ‘cause I heard my mom crying, and so I knew something was not right.”

Dalia’s teacher noticed deterioration in Dalia’s academic performance. She said, “My grades were going sort of down and she saw me very withdrawn.” Ms. Santiago gave Dalia a notebook which she introduced as their special way of communicating. It became a vehicle for her to express her feelings about the problems at home. She said, “I was basically journaling, but I didn’t know that’s what I was doing.” In her journal, the teacher gave Dalia the license to draw or use invented spelling. She welcomed the opportunity to share her troubles with her teacher. Ms. Santiago visited Dalia’s home and shared her concerns regarding the child’s sad demeanor with the mother. The teacher did not pry. She simply offered support without betraying Dalia’s trust or embarrassing her mother with personal questions. Dalia said that she would always be grateful to that teacher because “she just built a very secure place for me to go to and she helped me get through not only my language barriers, but my insecurity and my fears about my parents.”
Francis remembered his first grade teacher as a beautiful, accepting, and supportive teacher, very different from Ms. Figler, in the third grade whose violent reaction to his Brotherhood Week drawing left Francis with the realization that people could indeed be classified by the color of their skin. Let us hear Francis narrating the story of his first encounter with color.

I drew Jimmy in Crayola. Crayola used to have a crayon that they called flesh, and it was sort of pink really, pink or maybe a slight coloration like beige, but it was mostly pink from what I can recall. And so it was called flesh and I knew from my Sunday School that flesh meant skin, “For we ought to abstain from the calls of the flesh,” stuff like that. So anyway so I take that crayon and so I colored it and I take it up to her and Ms. Figler goes, “This is wrong. This is wrong. Go. Go. If you want… well there’s still some time, but…” So I went back, sat down and this time I said ‘Well Jimmy really, stop moving,’ and I really like ‘This gon’ do it. This gon’ happen now. Um hmm” So I am like really into this and I take that flesh-colored crayon and I just do it. Then you know in those days to be really special I took another piece of paper and I rubbed that crayon down ‘til his face was real shiny with that flesh color, real shiny, had blue eyes, and I had put the yellow on top of his head like that, and so I take it up to her and she looks and she looked at me with those, she had those cat eyeglasses that were like this [nonverbal] and her round face, it got so huge right in front of me and she said “This is wrong! Wrong! Jimmy is White! White!” and I just went and sat down, and I really never, drew for fun, really, until I was in about ninth grade with a terrific art teacher, for assignments though.
Later he said about this experience that, “Some things stay with you for whatever reason, but that probably was my first brush with there having been a difference.” Even though immediately following that year, he had received a very positive review from his teacher, Mrs. Bronson, regarding his Brotherhood Week drawing, Ms. Figler’s reaction to Francis’s apparent blindness concerning the color of his friend’s skin, touched him at a very emotional level and left a lasting impression. Lasting enough that he would never again for the rest of his elementary and middle school years draw for the pleasure of drawing.

Perhaps Francis’s experience in the third grade was tempered by the positive ones he had in school. Perhaps he was too young to experience the level of conceptual and emotional maturation that seems to be associated with the Encounter Stage of Helms’s (1993) racial identity model. What seemed certain was that for Francis the “sun of school” shone bright as he seemed to successfully navigate through his school career ultimately becoming a self-directed learner interested in art, poetry, acting, photography and above all, everything related to education.

Many of the participants recounted positive experiences with teachers. Claudia was in kindergarten when her mother visited her in Puerto Rico. Her mom had given her a pair of sunglasses before she left back to the U.S. A boy in her class took them away from her and broke them. Filled with emotion, she told me how the teacher hugged and comforted her making a world of a difference for her as those glasses represented a tangible connection to her mother whom she had not seen since she was taken to Puerto Rico at the tender age of three months.
Carmen and her mother frequently did not see eye to eye on the expectations for her to be the perfect little girl. Carmen found acceptance in one of her teachers and a mutual fondness that transcended the classroom. “I went to fourth grade and it was a really good teacher, Mrs. Lefevre, and I went to her house with her many times and then went home and that was nice.” One of her teachers lived in the neighborhood just behind the school building. A group of her students would go over during lunch time. Carmen adored her fourth grade teacher and when she needed a break from home, her teacher’s house was her favorite place to be. On occasions Carmen would threaten to leave her mother, “I’m going to Ms. Lefevre’s. I’m going to live there.” One day her mother probably thinking that Carmen was just being dramatic, told Carmen to go ahead and do it. Carmen said, “And I left. I went to her house. I stayed there for one day and a half.” Carmen laughed as she remembered the look on her mother’s face when Carmen made good on her threat and the teacher who received her with open arms.

Julia spoke of a favorite teacher too. This teacher was the person that she believed inspired her to pursue teaching as a career. There were times when Julia felt so oppressed by her father’s drunkenness and the domestic violence resulting from it that hope seemed almost impossible to access. During many of those times the kindness and unconditional positive regard of her teacher, who was the mother of her friend, came to the rescue. “She was the one that said, ‘You know, come over to my house, don’t worry. We’ll take care of it, just stay away.’ And she was my inspiration actually, for becoming a professional.”

Julia expressed the belief that her teachers had a great deal of influence on her resilience and that the lessons and examples she gleaned from her interactions with them, empowered her to become who she was. She said, “You collected. For me it was like I
Como el cantar del coquí

collected a little bit from each of my teachers and that’s what made me the person that I am.” In Julia’s eyes, her teachers were strong women who greatly influenced her life. She said, “They were role models for me.”

Ricardo, Claudia, and Julia reported having good relationships with their teachers in Puerto Rico and helping out in the classroom. Julia said, “Teachers, because they knew I knew the language, I was like their pet. I would help them correct papers, go for this, do this, do that, so it was like, I felt important. They made me feel important.” She was even in the wedding of one of her teachers. She said, “As a matter of fact, one of my teachers, when she got married, I was her maid of honor. There was a group of us that were in her wedding. And that was an honor for me.” Ricardo stated that he too was a “teacher’s pet.” I was always asking the teachers what I could do to help. Teachers were always proud of me. They were always there to help me out. So I’ve never had a problem with teachers.”

The data suggest that the participants in this study seemed to value positive interactions with teachers even when language proficiency issues stood in their way. For example, when language seemed to become an obstacle for Viviana to elicit the positive responses that she wanted from her teacher, she deemed it a challenge and pressed on. During her second grade year, Viviana craved involvement in classroom activities, but because of her limited English proficiency she would frequently feel invisible and ignored. She would come home and tell her mother that her teacher didn’t call on her, but called on another girl. “She always says like ‘Good for you, Ruby.’” and I’m like, “I want a good for me, Viviana!” A year later Viviana would have more positive experiences in school. We will revisit Viviana’s experience momentarily, but first let us look into
Armando’s experience in an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classroom.

Armando experienced a crash landing of sorts when his parents relocated to a southernmost city in the U.S. Although this city boasted a large population of Latinos, Spanish was not a welcomed language in school and bilingual education seemed like a fallacy. He was in the fifth grade. Armando’s world turned upside down when he transitioned from a private school with a teacher-student ratio of 1 to 13 where he had been very successful, to a large U.S. city’s public school system in a class with about 45 students to 1 teacher. To make matters worse, Armando’s teacher was bilingual, but she did not speak or understand Spanish and so she banned students from speaking Spanish, even if to convey the meaning of directions to each other for tasks assigned. Armando’s grades plummeted for a while until he figured out a way to communicate with peers and use them as resources to understand what he needed to do in class. He went from As to Ds when he came to the U.S. “It was not because I didn’t know the knowledge, or didn’t have the academic content. It was just because language was not there.” He credited that experience with being the reason he himself is a bilingual teacher. “I know what it feels not to have the language and go through that experience of trying to acculturate to a certain culture and a certain environment without having the necessary tools.”

The discovery of his passion for teaching SLLs coincided with his fifth grade year. He volunteered, helping SLLs at a local elementary school during his high school years under the supervision of teachers who made him feel valued within the school community. He was hired right out of high school as a support staff member for one of the schools where he volunteered as an early adolescent. He later received a scholarship
to pursue his dream of becoming a teacher. Under the “sun of school” Armando found his calling.

Dalia felt rejection in school as an SLL in the U.S. After her family relocated to the United States again, Dalia attended a public school where she tried on a daily basis to catch up with her peers in terms of English language proficiency. Dalia had moved to Puerto Rico when she was ready to begin Kindergarten. Her formal schooling until her eighth grade year had occurred in Puerto Rico. Although her mother ensured that the children practiced their conversational English at home, returning to the U.S. and attending the eighth grade was hard for Dalia. She reported that she was a good student and eager to learn. She recounted an instance when one of her eighth grade teachers made fun of her in front of the whole class. When she mispronounced a word during her weekly ESOL class, the teacher laughed and the class joined him. “He ridiculed me. I mean I cried. I started crying and he’s like ‘Oh come on. We were just joking.’” Never again did Dalia want to read aloud in class. She added, “Never again did I trust my teachers, and it took a long time” for her to even discuss the incident with any adult in school. She thought that teachers were there to guide their students and not to ridicule them.

Indeed, she remembered the day when the teacher made fun of her as a very sad day in her life which speaks to the power that teachers yield to make or break a student. Consider the magnitude of her statement. Dalia’s home was in her words, “dysfunctional.” Her dad doled out corporal punishment to her brothers as if they were men in need of a beating. Her parents argued frequently and her father was an alcoholic. How amazing that the actions of one teacher stood out with such relevance. There were
so many other things going on in Dalia’s life that could have occupied a place of distinction as the saddest or one of the saddest days in her life. The hurt etched in her memory, came as the result of feeling rejected and ridiculed by a trusted teacher. Her embarrassment, like a sharp blade, cut deep into her sense of trust, leaving behind an emotional wound that would take a long time to heal.

By now the reader may have noticed a pattern developing here. School for these individuals seemed like a lifeline. Even when they experienced rejection or ridicule there, they sought to connect with adults in the school. For example, Dalia did not read aloud in class for years, but found the way to continue to develop connections with her school. As a sophomore, she helped in the school counselor’s office and she remembers that year marking the point when she decided that she would allow herself to trust again by sharing her story. This counselor had verbally recognized her academic and intellectual abilities.

One day Mr. Raleigh, Dalia’s counselor, asked her to read something to him and she refused. He inquired about the reason for her reluctance to read aloud, but did not force her to do it; in fact, he told her to not worry about it. “When he said don’t worry about it is when the little light bulb went off in my head and I said ‘You know what? I’m going to tell him what happened.’” The counselor validated her feelings and expressed apologies for her having been through that negative experience. She said, “He was real apologetic and really nice to me.”

The school counselor’s attitude of acceptance made a big difference for Dalia. Here too, the emotional overdraft caused by an insensitive teacher seemed to be ameliorated by the deposits of acceptance made along the way by other adults in the school. It did not seem to matter if these adults were of the same gender as the participant.
or not. This suggests that even when there are clouds that may obscure some part of the “sun of school” here and there, other rays emanating from it unobstructed may carry a powerful charge and brightness that extends as Piirto (2002a) said, to the “suns” of home and community.

Viviana discovered her leader persona under the “sun of school,” thanks to a teacher who instead of looking past her, engaged her and facilitated her access to positive school experiences. We must bear in mind that Viviana was the little girl with the stepfather who more than once told her that she would never amount to anything. He would say to her that she was “the black sheep” of the family and that she was “never going to amount to anything.” He kept asking her, “Why don’t you just quit?” Viviana needed to feel accepted and to feel she belonged. Her mother loved and encouraged her, but it meant much when her third grade teacher noticed her and made her feel part of the group by including Viviana in classroom and school activities. Miss Bayona was Latina, “young and hip and I loved her to pieces.” Viviana got to play Little Red Riding Hood in a play, an indication that her teacher saw dramatic potential in her. “That was always a lot of fun for me.”

By the time she reached the fourth grade Viviana had developed the language skills in English to move into a monolingual classroom. The little girl who had been invisible in the second grade was a student leader by the fourth. This was the first time that Viviana found herself in a group of peers whose phenotype and ethnicity were different from hers and this fact did not go unnoticed. She had however, developed the self confidence to assume a leadership position within the group.
Leadership. Most of the participants proudly shared stories about their leadership experiences in school. Claudia, Julia, and Elisa were adept at organizing field trips in high school. Some of them were class officers. Viviana was in student council. Julia was vice-president of her class. She stated that this was a great accomplishment because males traditionally occupied this chair as well as the class president’s. Julia stated, “I was the vice-president. Back then that was big because it was always boys over girls.” She expressed that during one of the fundraisers she led she came into contact with special needs students, an experience that led to a lifelong interest in working with this population.

I remember once we had a fundraising activity for children who were deaf and blind in a hospital in San Juan. I was the one that organized everything, and we went through every single, little campo, [countryside], the little villages, collecting money and food. We raised, back then that was a lot, $3000. We took food. We took everything that those kids needed. We went to the school, itself, and we had a great time. It was just a beautiful experience being able to share with children that back then it wasn’t like every parent kept their child. If they had a certain disability, like blind or deaf or some kind of handicap, they would send them to an institution. So that was like an eye-opener, right there. That’s why I’m a special needs teacher today.

Claudia was a leader in obtaining a dress code policy change at her school during her seventh grade year. Her school prohibited females from wearing slacks. Claudia said they were tired of being limited to wearing skirts and so she and some friends got together and sprung into action. They spread propaganda for the change that they wanted
to see happen and then they made themselves new uniforms whose bottoms were slacks and not skirts. The young women were called into the principal’s office and their parents summoned to the school. Claudia said, “Nos reprendieron pero a la larga tuvieron que aceptarlo. [They scolded us but eventually they had to accept it.]

That marked the end of a gender biased dress code policy at her school. Claudia, like most of the females in this study, found in school a venue for self expression, leadership skills development, and inspiration for future endeavors. During her high school years, she continued to take on leadership roles and at age 18 actively engaged in politics by taking a role in her political party’s local chapter, canvassing nearby communities informing constituents of her political party’s agenda and collecting signatures in support of it. Years later, while completing her master’s degree in a large city in the U.S., she again assumed the stance of advocate and leader when the university tried to deny her and two others their degree based on paperwork that the university had allegedly neglected to file. Claudia met with the dean of graduate studies and did not leave the campus until the issue had been resolved. She and her two classmates, also Latinas, had completed all the requirements for the degree and thanks to Claudia’s advocacy and determination they were able to receive the degree they had earned.

The males in the sample did not speak much about having taken on leadership roles in high school. Francis was more active in church youth activities. Ricardo was busy assuming extra responsibilities at home to help his mom after his father left. He had to work in the family small business and missed out on “playing around.” Ricardo learned at an early age to be responsible and to make the best of a situation that he could not change overnight. He did what he felt he needed to do. No whining, no complaining.
Just taking care of business and gathering lessons along the way that would later serve as guiding principles that would become his moral standards for life.

Armando confessed that although he had many friends in high school, he would not describe himself as popular. His leadership experiences during that time were tied to his involvement in the schools, volunteering his time to help children who were SLLs and transitioning into the public school system of the city where he resided. By the time he was officially hired to work in the school district, the teachers and program directors knew him well. “I was a popular person in high school more or less, but I became real popular as an adult once I started working for the district and I was involved in many, many, many activities.”

Dalia had been a debate team champion in the fourth grade when she attended school in Puerto Rico. “They gave me a little banner and it said ‘Fourth Grade Debate Team Champs,’ and so they took me to school and they made a big deal,” Later, her sense of worth as a student suffered some attacks during her inception into the U.S. school system as we saw earlier with her eighth grade story, but that did not curtail her motivation to succeed. She excelled in sports and academics but Dalia said, “I worked very, very hard. You have no idea.” The hard work that Dalia referred to was more than just practicing for sports and studying for exams. Dalia spoke of the struggle she engaged in with adults in the school who had low expectations for her. She said, “You have to fight the stereotypical counselor and teachers who say ‘You’re not college material.’” She identified differences in English language proficiency as the reason why school personnel frequently ignored the potential of academically promising students. She said that she was told, “You don’t have the English. You have the basics. You can speak well,
but you don’t have the writing yet, and those literacy classes that you’re taking are a little bit above and beyond your level of comprehension.” Despite all her accomplishments in high school, Dalia was referred to her counselor for career counseling that pointed her in the direction of obtaining training in the clerical field. She refused to accept the advice arguing that she wanted to be either a clinical psychologist or a nurse. Much like the other participants in this study, Dalia refused to let others place limits on her goals based on what she considered were biased opinions and stereotypical prejudice.

Most of the participants in this study shared stories about their leadership experiences in school. Even Ricardo who did not speak about being in leadership positions at school said that he had often been a teacher’s pet when he was in school. I believe that the latter relates to leadership. In my experience teachers tend to place their favorite students or student helpers in roles that frequently put them in charge and therefore position them as leaders by default. Most, if not all the participants in this study had leadership experiences in school and they suggested that those experiences influenced their resilience. The educators who seemed to make a positive difference in the lives of the participants in this study offered their acceptance and support making the participants feel that they mattered. The ones who did not seemed to go into the annals of the participants’ school memories as an exception to the rule in terms of the adults they encountered there.

Carmen, another participant, told also of a counselor in her high school trying to send her on the path to a clerical career. “Then the counselor in school told me that I was not going to go anywhere. I should study secretary and I said, “I don’t even like to type.” I still cannot type today.” Carmen applied to a university in Puerto Rico that only accepts
students with outstanding academic standing and potential and successfully completed a bachelor’s degree in education, majoring in science. When I asked her what reason the counselor had given her for suggesting that she was not college material she responded, “I don’t know because I had all As.” Even though Carmen did not speak much English when she moved to the U.S. she had earned a master’s degree in education and had almost completed a post-graduate degree. She had also taught at the college level in the U.S.

Claudia completed high school earning credits for both the college preparatory and secretarial programs at her school. This happened with the help of dedicated teachers who made exceptions to include Claudia and a few other students in classes that had been closed due to high enrollment. These teachers also made themselves available to work with the students outside of the school day so that they could complete the credits needed to qualify for the general education diploma. Claudia mentioned each teacher by name and said that helping students today is her way of honoring the teachers who helped her in the past. She said, “Los maestros nos dieron el apoyo y yo creo que eso fué un logro bastante grande. Yo creo que teníamos el potencial y ellos creyeron en nosotros. [The teachers gave us their support and I believe that it was a pretty big accomplishment. I believe we had the potential and they believed in us.]”

Again, consistent with Reis et al.’s (2005) findings, the data suggest that these individuals believed that their positive connections with educators and school constituted an integral part of their resilience journeys and academic successes. Those positive interactions seemed to soften the blow of negative experiences in school and elsewhere. Stories of teachers as mentors and encouragers abounded in the data. Even when school
Como el cantar del coquí 205

did not seem like the most welcoming place, a teacher or counselor would appear and
with their unconditional positive regard convey acceptance and belief in the participant’s
capacity for success.

Deliberately attempting to keep the participants’ beliefs about teaching out of this
section proved to be a challenging task. Just as Marino-Weisman (2001) suggested and
Galindo and Olguín (1996) concluded, minority teachers tend to draw from their
experiences of being a minority in their interactions with students. This was evident for
most of the participants in this study. I have dedicated a special section in this report for
the discussion of the participants’ beliefs about how teachers can help students develop
resilience, particularly, but not exclusively for Latino students.

The findings here resonate with the thoughts of critical theorists like Anzaldúa
earlier that language is so intimately tied to an individual’s ethnic identity that one cannot
expect to attack or reject the former without hurting the latter. This idea goes hand in
hand with Rodriguez (1974), who cautioned that rejecting a student’s ethnic identity is a
costly proposition that results in poor teacher-student relationships, which in turn hurt
minority students’ outcomes. Fortunately, based on the stories of these participants, the
damage inflicted by an insensitive educator does not have to be fatal. Nurturing,
encouraging, and caring educators may help students change course in a trajectory gone
awry.

Value of education. Not one participant in this study missed the opportunity to
express the relevance of education in their lives. I saw tears in the eyes of some, as they
expressed how much they valued the opportunities that having an education had afforded them. Some spoke of education as liberating not only physically, but also cognitively. For example, Viviana said that she decided at a young age that education would be the key to her freedom. She said that at the time she thought, “Well if I’m educated, then I can get out of this situation. I can go away and not have to be in a situation that I don’t want to be.” Her prediction proved accurate and she was able to leave and experience new surroundings free from her stepfather’s tyranny. But there was an added benefit that Viviana sought to obtain and that was “Learning about what happened to me so I could better deal with my own understanding of it and my family’s, and also help other people.” She was in search of insights regarding her experiences with domestic violence and also seeking to fill her toolbox with instruments that would equip her to help others. This suggests that what Rodriguez (1974) concluded earlier regarding how educators’ meaning of their experiences as SLLs translate into their interactions with students may apply to their experiences with resilience as well.

Carmen encountered truths about herself during her graduate studies which had a shocking effect on her. While studying the work of critical theorists, she encountered a portrait of herself that surprised her. Carmen’s children never learned to speak Spanish because she was told that they would develop an accent just like their mother. Carmen opted to defer to the expert and not teach her children her vernacular. In fact she said, “I was traumatized. I didn’t talk in the phone for one year! And I said, ‘I don’t want my kids to get my accent.’” Later she would understand the rhetoric behind the pediatrician’s recommendations and why she had not felt compelled to second-guess a person whom
she deemed to be an expert. She described her discovery in her characteristically thick and proud accent.

Assimilation rhetoric was very powerful and then the colonial mentality that I brought from Puerto Rico, which I didn’t know I had until I went to my master’s degree and I start reading all this other stuff. It was just an eye opener. Oh wow! And bell hooks, *The Colonial Mentality* that’s why we look down when people talk to us, that’s from colonialism because you never look at your master’s face. The master for us is the colonial power. It’s like, “Oh! Wow!” and that’s why I did what I did because I thought, inside subconsciously American ways were superior than Puerto Rican ways, even though in another part of my brain I was so nationalist and so independent.

For Carmen, this discovery was liberatory because she then understood the decisions she had made and the emotions she had felt from the moment she began residing in the U.S. When she discovered this dichotomy within her she was able to negotiate her position and reclaim herself as the Puerto Rican woman that she had set out to be. She credited the power of education for what became a life-altering insight. She insisted, “I say education and critical awareness are so important.”

When Francis reflected on how education takes one places, he had tears in his eyes. A boy who grew up in the projects of one of the biggest cities in the nation, the son of parents who came to this country with the dream in their hearts of their offspring being able to gain through education better than what they had, that boy became a man who had sipped wine in Paris, felt the kiss of the Tuscan sun, and beheld with his own eyes the green landscapes of Ireland. He had sailed the ocean with the wealthy and worked his
whole life with those in most need of accessing resources. All this and much more thanks to the power of education.

Emma, Julia, Claudia, Ricardo and others credited education with being the driving force that propelled them to move up and forward and to be able to achieve the dreams that for their parents had been unreachable. Owning a home, traveling, being able to help others, and being a role model for family and for their students topped the list for the benefits that these participants had derived from obtaining an education. The “sun of school” became the place where many of the participants found the key to reaching their goals. For some it was under this “sun” where they discovered new possibilities which led them to a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. School provided them with resources, role models, mentors and even the first notions of ethnic diversity. These participants seemed to be talented in developing connections within the educational environment. The earliest recollection of an educational accomplishment came in the voice of Claudia who talked about having recited a poem in the first grade that one of her aunts had taught her. She won a prize from her teacher for a job well done. For these participants, the expectations espoused by their caregivers regarding education came alive under the “sun of school.” Their parents, similar to those of the achieving students in Reis et al. (2005), had instilled in them an understanding that education yielded the power of a socioeconomic upward mobility tool. Although there were instances where some of the participants hit a roadblock, they recuperated and continued to chase the dreams that had somehow begun at home and found for most, their place in school.

Perhaps their personalities elicited positive responses from the adults in their schools, as Werner and Smith (1982) concluded in their seminal study. Most of the
participants in this study were involved in extracurricular activities which may have served as sources for building social capital as others have suggested (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2008). These findings are consistent with the findings of researchers who posed earlier that involvement in church groups, sports and volunteer activities among others, avail youngsters with opportunities to share time and ideas with like-minded individuals who may indeed come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Doing this helps them stay away from youth who could negatively influence them.

These participants, similar to those in Antrop-Gonzalez et al. (2008) reported that they used emotions elicited by discrimination experienced at school to challenge themselves and to prove that Puerto Ricans too can excel academically. For example, Ricardo had a professor who made derogatory comments to him about Puerto Ricans. His strong cultural identity helped him deal with the situation without letting it derail him from his purpose. His words support the conclusions reached by other researchers in the field (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2008; Updegraff, 2007). Here is the story.

The Professor said that Puerto Ricans, all they were good for was coming over here to the United States and making babies and getting on Welfare, and I said “Isn’t that something for him to say something like that?” And I talked to him. I told him how I felt, and again I could’ve used that and really taken it as far as, perhaps taking it to the office or perhaps get him in trouble for making such a remark. However, for me, instead of getting mad, well I said “You know I’m going to show him differently and the only way that I can show him that is show him that I can excel, if not equal to, but better than some of the students.” So yeah, culturally I think it has helped me a lot to be where I’m at right now.
Ricardo credited his cultural identity for helping him reach his goals. He told this story when he discussed the role that his culture had played in his ability to rise above adversity. As he nursed the tattered little flag that he brought with him from Puerto Rico which had served as an anchor to remind him as he said of “where I’m coming from” in his hands, he avowed his stance against using discrimination as an excuse to give up. He said, “You can use it as an excuse, and that’s a problem that I have seen sometimes with people. They find excuses why they shouldn’t do this or why they shouldn’t do that, instead of finding excuses why they should.”

The stories under the sun of school that related to racial, ethnic, or language prejudices seemed to place most of the participants at the Preencounter stage of Helms’s (1993) theory of racial identity development at that point in their lives. Stories from later on in their lives that related to discrimination suggested that some of the participants may have been at the Encounter stage, others somewhere within the Immersion/Emersion stage, and others at the Internalization/racial transcendence stage of Helms’s (1993) theory.

As mentioned earlier, the maturation that comes with age may have much to do with that. For example, Dalia concluded that she was discriminated against at a government agency because of the color of her skin, and because of her accent. She expressed having the knowledge that although it was hard to prove, ethnic and racial prejudice constituted for her a disadvantage. Rather than expressing bitterness about this insight, she opted to become even more self-reliant, hold steadfastly to her cultural pride, and advocate for others who she believed did not have a voice. Dalia’s reaction to encountering discrimination seems to fit the general characteristics of someone in the
Internalization/racial transcendence stage of Helms’s theory of racial identity. (See Helms, 1993, p.30 for a summary of Helms’s Black Racial Identity Stages.)

Although it may be possible to squeeze the participants in this study within the stages of Helms’s theory, I would caution that not all minorities are one and the same. Thus trying to neatly classify us within a framework developed as a result of research done with other populations, whose historical context may differ considerably from the other, may not be fair or even ethical. For that reason, I leave you, the reader to draw your own conclusions regarding the possible stages of racial identity of the participants. My interest here is on the determination they demonstrated despite the clouds of prejudice that sometimes came in to obscure the rays emanating from the sun of school and the sun of community and culture.

Determination seemed to be a hallmark in the lives of these resilients. We will take an in depth look at how it manifested it their lives in chapter five of this dissertation. As I conclude this chapter, a new wave of excitement invades me. My hands shake as I hurry to type the final words here in order to dive into the personal attributes and beliefs of the participants in my study, but these vibrations do not emerge from fear. They come from a sense of urgency and the desire for my fingers to speed up and catch up with my thoughts so that I leave no stone unturned as I share with you, the reader, the personal characteristics and beliefs extracted from my participants’ stories.
CHAPTER V

Their “Essence:” Personal Attribute Themes

In 1993 Wolin and Wolin published a book on resilience and survivors of ecological environments whereas Piirto (2002a) might say, the “sun of home” had been covered by clouds. Wolin and Wolin suggested that there are seven resiliencies common to survivors of troubled families. Because the participants’ personal characteristics seemed reminiscent of Wolin and Wolin’s Seven Resiliencies, thus Wolin and Wolin’s work served as a springboard for this discussion. I have selected alternate terms for this report, with the caveat that this is not, by any means, an effort at theory construction as the size of the sample alone would disqualify any attempts to that effect.

The terms I have selected are inspired by Wolin and Wolin’s resiliencies, but provide a tighter fit as descriptors for major themes in this study. For example, Wolin and Wolin’s resiliencies numbers five and six are similar to my “Imagination” theme. Wolin & Wolin collapsed their humor and creativity themes into one chapter in their discussion of the seven resiliencies. From the data in this study, I comprehended why. Separating humor and creativity would not work here either because the data suggest that for these participants, they are intimately connected, although not one and the same. These terms represent instruments for articulating the picture that I have cognitively drawn from the data. I view them as six songs with lyrics commonly expressed by the voices of my study participants. Table 3 contains Wolin and Wolin’s seven major themes and the titles they inspired for this study. This organizational framework provides the premise for the discussion of themes concerning the personal characteristics of the participants. Table 4
lists the six major themes and their corresponding sub-themes. Our first in this part of our journey: the theme of Intuition.

Table 3

Comparison Table of Themes

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<tr>
<td>1. Insight</td>
<td>1. Intuition</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Independence</td>
<td>2. Self-reliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Relationships</td>
<td>3. Congeniality</td>
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<td>4. Initiative</td>
<td>4. Enterprise</td>
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<td>5. Humor</td>
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<td>6. Creativity</td>
<td>5. Imagination</td>
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### Table 4

**Key Personal Attributes**

<table>
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<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Intuition</td>
<td>• Discernment and Differentiation</td>
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<td>• Choices</td>
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<td>• Intelligence</td>
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<td>• Adapting and Coping</td>
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<td>• Self-reliance</td>
<td>• Walking Away</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Persistence</td>
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<td>• Congeniality</td>
<td>• Love of Family</td>
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<td>• Generosity to Others</td>
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<td>• Generosity of Others</td>
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<td>• Gratitude</td>
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<td>• Respect</td>
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<td>• Enterprise</td>
<td>• Internal Locus of Control</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Assertiveness and Determination</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Risk-taking</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Imagination</td>
<td>• Inventiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Humor: Funny Side Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spirituality</td>
<td>• Faith</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Service</td>
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**Intuition**

We live in an era where intuition seems to have acquired a level of mysticism that meets with raised eyebrows every time someone utters the word. Originally I had selected
the term *second sight* as the encompassing theme for this section. I soon abandoned the idea because of its paranormal underpinnings. There is nothing paranormal or even abnormal about the themes and subthemes comprised here. In fact, this is as human as it gets, for phenomenology is about understanding human beings’ experiences with a phenomenon and the meaning of the construct that they have derived from those experiences (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

The participants in this study could have been tagged for dismal life outcomes leading to existences filled with regret. Notwithstanding, that was not the case with this group. Their stories were verbally articulated pictures of moments in time when something in them compelled them to seek alternative definitions of self and the world around them. The hope found in the acts that Wolin and Wolin (1993) identified as indicative of insight, catapulted them to the hopeful and satisfactory mental, emotional and physical spaces they occupied at the time of this study. Insight, as described by Wolin and Wolin, allows the person to think critically about his or her adverse circumstances. The individuals in this study developed the ability to discern between what was and what ought to be throughout their personal journeys.

**Discernment and differentiation.** “I tried to learn from others the things that are necessary to make my life easier. Use what is positive and discard what is useless.” These words from Ricardo tell about his approach to life. He was a strong proponent of taking the best and leaving the rest as are were the others in this sample. The data suggest that discernment was a first step to redefining the self and the elements that made up their different contexts.
These people did not dwell on the negative, but seemed to have a keen eye for sorting out good and bad; useful and useless; truth from deceit. For example, Ricardo firmly believed in the value of some of the teachings he received from his father, so much so that he had tried to instill them in his sons. He was able to understand, even at the time of his father’s abandonment, that his dad’s leaving was not a reflection upon his value as a person or a result of anything he did. Able to separate the valuable lessons gleaned from Dad and the behavior that caused so much pain, Ricardo integrated the positive and deliberately avoided emulating the other. He said, “I will never do to my kids what my father did to us. I try to avoid the same mistakes. I try to spare them the agony that I went through.”

Even when adults in their lives spoke hurtful words or acted in hurtful manners, these participants seemed to know that those negative words and actions were not really defining of them and their abilities. For example, Julia’s alcoholic father topped off his corporal abuse with the declaration that she should just go get a job because she was too stupid to go to college. She said, “And that was my goal, to make him realize that I could overcome the alcohol calling me stupid. That sunk into my head where it just, like you could hear the pounding of stupid, stupid, stupid.” Julia was an adolescent at the time this occurred. Several things stand out in this quote. Julia somehow figured out that the alcohol was responsible for her father’s words. Still, they seemed to knock the wind out of her for a minute. Then through positive self-talk, she regained her balance. “And I said no, I’m going to become someone, and I’m going to show him the contrary. And that’s what I did.” Julia’s father was alive and well when this study took place and he would tell
Como el cantar del coquí 217

anyone who would listen about how smart Julia was and how she was just like her dad. She laughed as she said, “Oh, yeah. ‘Smart just like her daddy.’ I don’t think so.”

Viviana’s stepfather also put her down suggesting that she give up trying to amount to anything, but the more he did this, the more determined she became to prove that his opinion of her did not have the power to define her. She thought to herself, “Okay, you don’t want me to do anything? Then I’m going to be the best that I can be because you think I can’t be.” Viviana had no contact with her stepfather, but he knew that she had a graduate degree. The look of satisfaction was priceless as she recounted these events.

Marlena was severely punished anytime she did anything that went against her mother’s expectations. She still had scars from those days. While she could have turned to hating and resenting her mom, she focused on the positives, such as her mother’s strengths as a homemaker. Marlena viewed her mother’s hard work as an act of love. She found justification for her mother’s behavior in the stories of how her mom had been raised. Marlena vowed to never physically abuse her children. She made a conscientious decision to not follow in her mother’s footsteps. “I didn’t want to have a big family with a lot of kids. Oh No! So that made me strong. That made me go [in] the direction I went.” She decided early on that she wanted a different life for herself. Marlena talked about her mother’s approach to discipline and she called it by what it was, namely, excessive and abusive, but her insight on why her mom was the way she was helped her overcome the abuse and break the pattern by using a different approach to discipline with her own children.

Carolina wrote that she actively sought to have a life different from her mother’s.
“By me watching, very observant, I knew I did not want to go through [what] she did and made it my priority to try to avoid having to go through the same situations or circumstances she did.”

For these participants, differentiating themselves from their parents and others whose life’s circumstances or behaviors they sought to avoid required deliberate attempts and an understanding of what choices would best lead them to their goal.

**Choices.** The data tell us that the people in this sample had the critical thinking skills to evaluate and make judgments about what to keep and what to let go. They also had the ability to make right choices based on their perceptions of the consequences that may follow. Marlena, for example, grew up exposed to some of her brothers’ drug use, but she never indulged. This is how she explained her reluctance to partake, even though illegal substances were at an easy reach. She said, “I would see this, and have I ever touched it? I saw them dealing. I saw every [thing]. No, that’s not what I wanted. I don’t like to be locked up. I hate it. I like my freedom.”

Marlena figured out that in spite of the exposure to the drugs, she had a choice. She did not have to follow those of her brothers who were using and dealing. She knew what consequences might come and made the choice to say no to drugs. Marlena stated that she believed there were no excuses for making wrong choices. She spoke about discernment. “You have to make choices and you have to know what’s right or wrong, and that depends on you, and if you do something wrong you have consequences.”

Sometimes discernment saved the person from presenting mental health issues based on a legacy of mental health problems suffered by their parents or siblings.
Carmen, for example, had a sibling who was admitted into the psychiatric ward of a hospital in town. When overwhelming feelings of sadness came over Carmen, she knew the signs and was quick to ask herself reflective questions with the purpose of figuring out first, what the trigger may be for the feelings and second, what she needed to change in order to remove it. For example, she grappled with depression when she had a traumatic discrimination-based incident at the university where she taught. As a result of that event, she said, “I was three months in here with depression. I didn’t get out of the house. I said, ‘You know what? The hell with it. I’m not going to be responsible for the racism of these kids anymore. I’m done.’”

Carmen was experiencing an ethical dilemma closely related to her cultural identity. As soon as she withdrew from a situation that she had tried to change without success, she was well again. She reported being happiest in her public school classroom. When winter skies made her feel blue, she turned to non-invasive homeopathic remedies which helped her get through those winter months. She told me about her natural light lamp and shared that during the months when sunlight was scarce; she began her day with the following ritual. “I put it in here in the morning in the winter and I drink my coffee. You’re supposed to be under the light 10 minutes or 15 minutes and I read my paper and I’m under the light.”

The point here is not that these people were perfect. They were not and they would tell you so. What set them apart was their ability to face the ugliness and threats that life can sometimes bring by figuring out the role they could play to improve their own circumstances. For example, Carmen knew that she did not have to end up in the mental ward of a hospital just because her sibling did. From her perspective, her sibling’s
illness did not constitute a sentence for Carmen to follow the same path. One can surmise
that the manner in which the participants made sense of their environments, gave way to
a change of course in their lives leading to improved outcomes.

Remember Francis’s father and his anger management issues? Francis did not
become an angry man and he did not judge his dad for his angry outbursts. He intuited
that his dad’s frustration stemmed from his inability at the time, to offer to his wife and
two sons the things that he wanted to be able to give them. Francis emulated his father’s
zest for adventure and followed his path through Europe. He began saving at age sixteen
for a European vacation with the goal of visiting the places in his dad’s pictures. He
achieved that goal. Francis expressed love, admiration, and gratitude for both his parents.
His ability to make sense of his father’s behavior helped him understand it from a
perspective that seemed to avoid costs to his sense of self. The tenuous father-son
relationship of Francis’s early years developed into a strong bond with his father.

The accuracy of participants’ theories about the reasons for their parents’ negative
behaviors seems of little relevance as long as they provided a shield from attacks to their
sense of self. I believe that the alternative explanations they gave themselves differed
from denial because they seemed very aware of what the parents did wrong by
commission or omission. They candidly admitted their parents’ wrongdoings and
deliberately abstained from reproducing the undesirable behaviors. There seems to be a
protective quality about their ability to generate these alternative explanations as they
were able to connect with their parents without dwelling on past distress, thus
maintaining the freedom to be different.
Claudia, for example, could have grown up believing that there must have been something wrong with her when her mother did not come to live with her and her siblings in Puerto Rico. Claudia, too, came up with an explanation for why her mother did not raise her, and for her father’s abuse. Among the list of things gone wrong in her parents’ lives were the dreams that her mother was never able to achieve, her grandfather and uncle’s unfair treatment of her mom, and in the case of her father, his early orphanhood and homelessness. Claudia said her father had a rough life. During his childhood he lived with his father and stepmother and lived a fairly uneventful life until his stepmother died. Claudia’s paternal grandfather was not able or willing to care for his son and daughter and so he dropped them off in an orphanage. To Claudia’s father, anything seemed better than living in the orphanage. She said, “Entonces mi papá se fugó y vivió prácticamente en la calle y ahí conoció malas personas y él estuvo en vicio. [Then, my father ran away and practically lived on the street and that is where he met bad people and he became an addict.]”

Satisfied with the understanding the she was not of lesser value to her parents, Claudia accepted her circumstances, vowed to not become like either one of her parents, and adopted her grandparents as her parents. At the time of this study her grandparents had died, but Claudia had established a great relationship with her mother and frequently visited her in P.R. She had an amicable relationship with her father who was now drug free, and visited with him when she traveled to the town where he resided.

Armando had other choices to make. He had to choose at a young age between seizing life as a nineteen year old, and becoming the sole provider for a family of five. He chose the latter. He understood how much his family needed his support. Armando could
have used this unfortunate turn of events as an excuse to never aspire to anything better, but he did not. The focus here is choice.

The participants in this study seemed to have a tendency to look at their circumstances and weed out the inconsequential to get to what needed to be done, treasured and redefined. They did not allow poverty, abuse, death, illness, or abandonment to define them. They intuitively knew what choices they needed to make and were able to make accurate guesses about the possible consequences. Every single one of them expressed a belief that you have to make the best choice possible and be ready to face the consequences of your actions. This had been a guiding value in their journeys. The thing about choices is that there is always a chance that one will make a mistake. We have all known someone who has been rendered immobile for fear of being wrong. These participants seemed to live life with the certainty that one has to weigh the alternatives, make a decision, and if per chance one makes a mistake, there is no honor lost in regrouping, learning from the experience, and moving on. As Ricardo stated, it is just a matter of, “Learn from your mistakes. Use your mistakes as a stepping stone.”

Viviana said that overcoming hurdles in life, “It’s a choice. Either you stay in a situation or you decide not to, and that’s with anything.” The important question in her opinion was, “What are you going to choose?”

Dalia saw herself as giving up the right to choose whether or not she would take on multiple roles at age twenty. I asked her how she managed those multiple roles at such a young age. She said, “I had no choice. I had to manage them because it was up to me. People depended on me . . . it was my responsibility. . . It was my choice. It was my consequence.”
Claudia made a point about choices that illustrated her perspective which maintained that choices are up to the individual who can draw from his or her experiences to select which road they will follow bearing always in mind that each choice has its corresponding consequence. She said that it is up to a person to determine what he or she does with his or her life. “Siempre yo he dicho que hay dos caminos; el camino malo y el camino bueno. Queda de tí reconocer, aceptar y mirar cuál de los caminos tú quieres, pero siempre acuérdate de las consecuencias. [I have always said that there are two paths; the good path and the bad path. It is up to you to recognize, accept and see which of the paths you want. But always remember the consequences.]”

**Intelligence.** Some researchers (Garmezy, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992), have suggested that intelligence is a personal characteristic that is promotive of resilience in the presence of excessive stress. Masten, (2009) cited intellectual skills as promotive of resilience pointing to normative brain functioning rather than intelligence quotient. Others (Collishaw et al., 2007), however, have suggested that intelligence is not significantly related to resilience. The findings in this study seem consistent with Garmezy and Werner and Smith’s appraisals about the relationship between intelligence and resilience. We can agree that it is likely that these participants possessed at the least, an average intellectual quotient, based on the fact that the lowest level of education attained was at the graduate level. They graduated from accredited universities. Some of them stated that parents praised their intellectual capacities and teachers acknowledged their potential. Emma said, “Oh my God, well my mother thought that I was smart, and so did my father.” Claudia stated that she and her friends had potential and that the
Como el cantar del coquí 224

teachers “…creyeron en nosotros [they believed in us].” Julia’s experience was different at home as we saw earlier. Her father expressed a lack of belief in her abilities, but she reflected on her academic success and decided that she was indeed intelligent. She thought, “‘I have good grades. I loved biology, I love chemistry.’ I mean I liked all those hard courses where I was doing well. ‘How can I be stupid?’ So I said, ‘No, I’m not stupid.’”

Several of the females in the group had been successful in their science courses and had originally wanted to pursue a career in biology or chemistry. They did not, because of not so obvious reasons. Although gender discrimination may have played a role in determining the women’s access to information on these careers, they did not speak of gender as a barrier to their career goals. This was very interesting to me as a school counselor aware of gender biases that can often creep into career counseling situations. Reasons cited by these women for selecting a different career seemed to result from the attempts to expedite their entrance into professional jobs that would allow them to improve their financial situations and take care of their families. Lack of intellectual ability did not surface as a factor.

Elisa had selected biology as her major, but two years into the program, she got married and then pregnant. She decided that the quickest way to obtain a paying job would be to select an alternate career path. She said that she thought, “¿Qué otra carrera puedo estudiar que pueda usar esas clases de biología y terminar con una carrera? [What other career can I study where I can use those biology classes and end up with a career?]” After thinking about her options she decided that a career as a science teacher would meet her needs.
Elisa needed to finish school quickly, get a job and take care of her baby. Switching her major allowed her to do just that. She, as most of the other participants, seemed to have the ability to engage in reflective self-talk whenever she met a bifurcation in the road. Like Elisa and Julia, Carolina loved science. She said, “I always loved biology, chemistry. Actually I was pretty good. I had won a couple of first prizes with chemistry.” Carmen also spoke about her academic success and initial career dreams. “I was very smart in school. I wanted to be a veterinarian. But of course, we don’t have veterinary schools in Puerto Rico, and I was so nationalist.” Carmen opted to become a science teacher. She would not have chosen to go outside of Puerto Rico to study veterinary, even if money had not been an issue. Doing so would have meant going against the grain established by the political views she held at the time. She offered an explanation for choosing teaching instead. The reader can find Carmen’s thoughts about choosing teaching as a career in the section on teaching of this study. Dalia was another participant who had dreamed of a science-related career. She initially chose nursing.

Dalia successfully fulfilled the course requirements of the nursing program at the college she attended. Her clinical internship began two years into her nurse education program. She fainted every time she had to perform a task involving needles. She said, “When my Supervisor came to evaluate me, I was doing an IV and I passed out again, she said, ‘I’m so sorry, but you cannot be a nurse. This is your fourth time passing out. You have a phobia.’” Dalia had to choose another career path as her fear of needles precluded her from completing her nursing degree.

Any claims regarding the relationship between the constructs of intelligence and resilience based on the data gleaned from this study would constitute an aberration here. I
have established that this study is not in the positivist research tradition and if it were, the small sample alone would render any claims of a possible relationship between intelligence and resilience insignificant and naive. I submit, however, that the data from this study provide enough evidence to suggest simultaneity. That is, that for this sample, the presence of at least average intellectual ability, coincided with the presence of their ability to be resilient. Their ability to reflect, redefine, and make right choices seemed to facilitate their adaptation to and ability to cope with new environments, challenges, and unforeseen events.

**Adapting and coping.** The participants in this study related their ability to adapt to their capacity to resil. Most of them faced sudden and sometimes potentially devastating events in their lives. Their stories and statements suggest that although adapting is not easy, being able to do it as needed adds to a person’s chances of overcoming adversity. Frequent mobility, parental absence, the death of loved ones, chronic child illness, prolonged hospitalizations, and more, comprised changes and thus the need for the participants to adapt prevailed. For example, Emma had an almost fatal accident when she was nine years old.

After being diagnosed with rheumatic fever, Emma moved from the hospital into a convalescent home where she spent the rest of her fifth grade year. She said, “So I didn’t get out of bed anymore. I was always in a wheelchair and using bedpans. I had my 10th birthday there.” Her parents visited her every weekend. Emma adapted to this new environment by making herself useful to others and focusing on the sights outside her window in a room that she shared with nineteen others. Girls would stand in line by her
Como el cantar del coquí 227

wheelchair so that Emma could braid their hair, adorning their braids with colorful satin ribbons. She told the story without lamentations. In fact, she had many positive things to say about the place. We will revisit her story later under the section addressing the participants’ optimistic perspective.

The participants in this study seemed to have a talent for dealing with discomfort and distress by making the best of a situation and then moving on. Armando shared with me how frustrated he felt when he encountered school in the U.S. for the first time. Additionally, the move that precipitated his induction into the public school system in the U.S., brought with it changes at home as well.

Armando had lived in close proximity to his grandparents all his young life. His father, a well-known entertainer, earned a salary that afforded Armando’s mom the freedom to stay home with the children. He described those early years as a time of abundant financial resources. “I had every toy in the world . . . We traveled. . . It was very good, actually.”

All that changed when his parents relocated to the U.S. Now Armando’s mother had to work outside the home and school became a challenge. Armando identified this event as the roughest day in elementary school. “Having to move to The States. Having to leave private school to go to public school because resources were not there for us to go to private school.” The family situation changed, as his father returned to truck driving and his mother entered the work force. “We went from high to almost low. It was real tough.”

Armando did not see himself as having a choice in the matter and this was a recurring theme among these participants. They made choices when they could and when
there were no choices available to them for modifying their circumstances, they adapted and moved on. I asked Armando how he coped with this sudden change of lot. He said, “We had to [adapt]. We had no choice [laughs]. . . . You always throw your tantrums as a child. . . . You have to do what you can and still move on.”

Adapting did not seem to be something that happened overnight for these individuals. There was no magical formula that allowed adaptation to just happen. It took work. Insight is the key here. That intuitiveness that these participants seemed to have that allowed them to gauge whether or not a battle was worth fighting. For example, Armando went from being a straight A student in Puerto Rico, to bringing home poor marks from his new school in the U.S. Neither he nor his parents spoke English. Consequently, efforts to support Armando in his struggle to assert his needs in school were limited to his parents adopting a teacher-knows-best stance and exhorting him to do whatever the teacher said. The parents were not able to articulate their child’s needs to school personnel due to their language limitations. Armando concluded that it would be useless to insist on reclaiming a way of life that was over and invested his energy in finding positive ways to experience success in school. Within a couple of years, his family moved to another city, this time in the Midwestern U.S. and Armando had to adapt to a new school system and a whole new climate. He did it again, successfully.

Claudia was a young bride when she went to live in Germany. She spoke neither German nor English. Her move from a tropical paradise to the cold Germanic winter climate took some getting used to. She would revel in the days when the sun could be seen in the sky of her new home. She quickly had to learn how to communicate with others there to get her groceries and access healthcare services and such. Claudia missed
Puerto Rico terribly. A glimmer of hope and a sense of connectedness appeared with the advent of Goya food products in Germany. Claudia and her husband founded a group with other Puerto Rican soldiers stationed there and she would cook for them. Those visits gave her sort of a base while she adapted to other aspects of her life that she could not change. She said, “De esa manera estuvimos allá tres años y nos ayudamos mutuamente. [In that manner we were there three years and we mutually helped one another.]”

Ricardo had to adapt to his father’s absence. He had to adapt to taking on adult responsibilities. Once his father left, no longer could he expect to spend time with peers after school. He had work to do and chores to complete. He was a teenager when he first came to the U.S. He then had to adapt to a new language. As most of the participants, Ricardo had taken English in school in Puerto Rico and as most of them said, had not mastered the conversational aspect of the language because opportunities to practice it in relevant situations were pretty much non-existent. Ricardo, like many others in this study, had to learn to interact in the dominant language of his new place of residence. He interacted with the teenagers who were his neighbors by using gestures, so that he could have someone to play with. “You have to change if you want to see changes. You have to do something different.” Ricardo, realizing that stagnation was not an option if he wanted to participate in the game, chose to do something about it. Equipped with a repertory of hand gestures and a desire to learn, he facilitated his own adaptation to his new surroundings by taking the risk to try something new.

Elisa was a vibrant young mother when she arrived in the U.S. Soon after she moved to this country, she found out that her husband was cheating on her with someone
at work. She tried to rescue the relationship by suggesting that they seek counseling, both marriage and spiritual. Her husband refused. Eventually, the relationship ended in divorce. Meanwhile, Elisa worked hard to adapt to a place where language was a barrier, but not an impediment for her. She got a job in a public school district and began successfully teaching there. All these things required that Elisa adapt to new sets of circumstances, and fast, but the most devastating change of all, was when she fell gravely ill. A complete surprise because there was no history in her family of the symptoms she presented.

Elisa was now alone trying to raise her two kids, and she was very ill, so ill that her children had to help her dress in the morning because she could not do it on her own. She did not stop working. Medication after medication failed to make her better. She was hospitalized. The side effects of the medications were devastating her body. She had a stroke in addition to many other health problems. I asked her how she coped with all of this going on. She simply said, “Bueno yo creo que lo que me mantuvo con esperanza fue pues, mis hijos. Seguir viviendo, mis hijos. Tenía los hijos por quienes seguir.” [Well, I think that what kept me hopeful was, well, my children. To continue living, my children. I had my children for whom to continue.]

In the midst of all this, Elisa completed a master’s degree. The photograph of her in full regalia and holding her diploma was part of her collection of pictures just as her hospital picture was, suggesting what was confirmed by the stories and thoughts of most if not all participants. These resilients faced changes head on. They made choices where they could, and found alternate ways of connecting, expressing, or simply grounding themselves in order to be able to carry on with the business of living. They exhibited a
belief in the self and in the power to effect change in their lives that was not delusional or naïve. They did not blame their parents or others for whatever adversities came their way. They sought to make sense of things. For the individuals in this group, the focus was not on blame. This may have acted as a promotive factor for them as suggested by Feinauer and Stuart (1996), who concluded that for survivors of abuse blaming their selves and or destiny were equally disempowering attitudes. The participants in this study seemed to be flexible and they each refused to take the stance of a victim. Dalia said, “I didn’t blame my parents. I didn’t blame anybody. I had sort of talked to my priest, and I wanted to make sense.” Dalia said that she often engaged in trying to make sense of her experiences. She frequently questioned, “But why? ¿Por qué?” She expressed knowing that clear answers about the adverse circumstances she faced in her life were not always accessible. Her questions rose from her desire to achieve a sense of closure, and not from a need to be pitied. She said, “Don’t let people victimize you. Don’t be a victim. You know, sometimes people’s behaviors, negative as they are, they can become contagious and they will cripple you for the rest of your life.”

This statement made me wonder about how much money Dalia may have saved on therapy thanks to the insights expressed in these words. Consistent with Wolin and Wolin’s (1993) findings, the participants in this study did not fear “asking searching questions and giving honest answers” (p. 67). Doing this led them to insights that seemed to be promotive of resilience. It may seem much easier to blame people and circumstances around us, as doing so tends to relieve us of any responsibility for taking action. The people in this study would say that blaming and resilience are incompatible terms. These participants believed that you achieve happiness and or satisfaction through
recognizing that you have the power to make choices and can muster the courage to accept consequences and make changes as needed in order to reach your dreams and aspirations. In other words, dream, think, and act accordingly.

Their stories, consistent with Wolin and Wolin (1993), suggest that one of the things that might have helped them overcome obstacles was their ability to break away from noxious family thought and behavioral patterns they found could only serve to stifle their chances of achieving a state of mental and physical homeostasis. The data suggest that for the participants in this study, intuition may have manifested through a constant process of dreaming, thinking, and acting. That same intuitive insight allowed these participants to ask the right questions and provide honest but not brutal answers. Those reflective moments seem to have led them to actions that resulted in their breaking down barriers and achieving a sense of satisfaction in life, a satisfaction that may not have come without a cost as it emerged from the adverse circumstances each of them experienced.

**Self-reliance**

Wolin and Wolin (1993) described the resiliency they called “Independence” as a way in which resilient survivors negotiate their needs with those of their dysfunctional families. Doing this, they posed, frequently takes the form of breaking away from dysfunctional family ties. Looking at the findings in this study in light of the seven resiliencies introduced by Wolin and Wolin, I decided that the best fitting descriptor for this theme would be *self-reliance*. When the chips fell, all they had was themselves to count on. These individuals had to make hard decisions and sometimes even let go of
some of their dreams in order to efficiently negotiate the forks in the road. The participants in this study seemed to possess the ability to evaluate their adverse circumstances, the courage to take action, and the sense to redirect said actions as needed in order to regain their balance and move on. Painful as it may have been, sometimes the first step to that place of calm was to simply walk away.

Walking away. Similarly to Wolin and Wolin’s (1993) findings, the participants in this study broke away from the unreasonable expectations of their families of origin. The individuals in this study’s sample conveyed something which I believe cannot be explained using the term independence as each and every one of them expressed the need to connect with others. In fact, I believe therein lied their ability to access resources. They understood their own needs for assistance and support from others. The difference here is that they relied on themselves to figure out when the support was warranted and who they should elicit it from. These were not needy people going around hoping to find a friend. They knew when to stay and when to walk away which in some cases as we can surmise, took much courage and the self-belief to know that breaking away was the right thing to do.

Elisa was new to the United States when she found out that her husband had entered into an illicit affair with another woman. Forgiveness seemed to have gotten lost on its way to her heart, but she remained in the marriage. Elisa, as many others in this sample, self-reported as stubborn. She wanted to make the marriage work. She and her husband mutually expressed that intention to the other. She moved with her husband and children to another state. She said, “Decidimos darnos una segunda oportunidad. Las
Como el cantar del coquí [234]
cosas no funcionaban como eran y tuvimos que separarnos. [We decided to give ourselves a second chance. Things were not functioning as they were and we had to separate.]” Elisa said that she reached the realization that it was over when her spouse refused to participate in any of the alternatives for help that Elisa presented him with. She decided that her one-sided attempt to save the marriage would not be enough. Being the only party willing to try anything from marriage counseling to church involvement would mean nothing if he refused to engage in the solution. Elisa said, “Y ahí le dije, ‘Quiero el divorcio.’” [“And that’s when I told him, ‘I want a divorce.’”]

Elisa’s recount of how she arrived at the decision to get a divorce was devoid of the sorrowful expressions of a slated ex-wife. It was easy to follow the thought process involved. First she admitted that there was a problem and that she struggled with forgiving her spouse’s betrayal. She was, however, willing to make things work. Second, she tried to collaborate with her spouse to find solutions to their marital problems. When the only option offered by the husband was to remain in a dysfunctional situation without taking action to make things better, Elisa broke away. There we see that intuition or insight in action again. Intuitive thought allowed her not only to cognitively process the situation, but to choose the right timing for her final decision. She volunteered, “No me traumatizé porque yo quería el divorcio. [I was not traumatized because I wanted the divorce.]” By the time she articulated that she wanted a divorce, she was able to make peace with the decision because she had thoroughly considered the options.

Five out of the nine women in this sample were divorced. One broke off her engagement and another divorced and is now remarried. The stories seem to follow a similar pattern. These women would not settle for the role of the all-forgiving and
abnegated female who stays in a relationship in spite of her needs not being met. They did not express ill feelings towards their ex-partners; on the contrary, they wished them the best. As Viviana said, “We’re still friends and like I said, I wish him the best of luck in whatever he chooses to do, and I think I grew.” Divorce was not something that any of these women had in mind when they pronounced their wedding vows. Dalia said that she had always thought, “I don’t want history to repeat itself.” She hoped to be able to say that things would be different for her, that she would not end up divorced like her parents. Nevertheless, things did not turn out the way she had wanted them to. “I was a product of divorce, and I also got divorced, but my divorce was not like my parents’.” She said that her former spouse had “had some issues that he had to deal with” on his own and so they separated. He was never abusive toward Dalia or their children. She said, “He sort of helped them, was involved, but nothing like my parents, in that sense with the abuse. Nothing like that.”

Dalia was the only one who got divorced who had not married a Puerto Rican man. She was happily remarried. Her husband was a man of a different ethnicity who shared her interests on many levels and appreciated her culture. She said, “He came into my life at the right time and he’s been a wonderful addition to my life, to my kid’s life and my family just loves him. He’s a wonderful man and I feel very blessed.” These women were take-charge kind of women; thus it is possible that the expectations of their Puerto Rican husbands differed from the ones they had for themselves. They simply refused to be forced into roles that many of them grew up trying to avoid. They walked away, but not without first trying to redefine the relationships in a manner that would honor both the marriage and their individuality.
Julia attended marriage counseling before reaching the point where she decided that the marriage was over. Her husband, a professional and brilliant man, was an alcoholic. When he was inebriated he would become verbally abusive. You might recall that Julia was the one with the abusive and alcoholic father. She was one of the women who wanted so much to follow a path different from her mother’s in terms of domestic life. She did not want to fail at marriage. Where was her intuitive sight when she met this man and then married him? Perhaps he was a master of deceit. When he showed his true colors, she was devastated, but she would do her best to save the marriage. “A lot of things go into that time you put into the marriage, and you really want to make it work. But there are things in life that you just have to do in order to overcome those obstacles.”

She recounted the path that led to her breaking out of her marriage. They went to counselors but her husband denied he had issues with alcohol and blamed others in the family, including Julia. The counselor told her that the marriage wouldn’t survive and that she should leave before her safety was jeopardized. “It did take me time after that to divorce, but I did.”

Whether we choose to view these women as resilient or not based on the fact that they got divorced, may be a matter of perspective. I believe that what points to their resilience is the fact that they had the fortitude to admit the problem, evaluate the possibilities, spring into action, and then redirect when the action taken failed to yield the desired or required outcome. A sense of independence is instrumental to a person’s ability to break away from a loved one when the relationship proves detrimental to the individual (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). The participants in this study ultimately relied on their inner strength to be able to step back and away from people and situations that challenged
their wellbeing. Some of these participants had to break away from their families in order to grow and to prevent running into dead ends.

Claudia was dressing for her prom when she overheard her grandparents talking about death. She thought about what she heard and decided that she could not stay home after high school for two major reasons. 

“Era tiempo para mí de independizarme. Al escuchar la conversación de mis abuelos, yo dije, ‘Si les pasa algo a ellos, ¿cómo yo me voy a aprender a desenvolver en mi vida?’” [It was time for me to become independent. When I heard the conversation between my grandparents, I said, ‘If something happens to them, how am I going to learn how to manage my life?’]” Claudia’s solution to this dilemma was to eventually break away from the family unit and to stay at the college dorm. She had to fight her grandfather to get him to agree to let her go away, but she eventually got her way. She could have made the twenty minute commute to and from college every day, but she needed her aging grandparents to start getting used to her absence from the house and in this fashion she would also begin to train herself to live without their constant physical presence in her life. She said, “Pero ellos nunca supieron la razón. Sinó que pensando en el futuro para ellos y para mí, porque algún día yo tenía que también irme de mi casa, y ¿cómo ellos iban a aceptarlo? [But they never knew the reason. Meanwhile I was thinking about the future for them and for me because some day I too would have to leave home and how were they going to accept that?]” Claudia would stay in college during the week and come home on the weekends. She was right to think that the day might come when she would have to live away from home. Little did she know that the move would take her to an entirely different place on a distant continent.
Walking away from dysfunctional relationships, even when they were loving ones, seemed like a hard thing to do, but that is what the people in this study did. From the females who went away to college against their parents’ desires, the ones who moved out against their parents’ wishes, to the sons who left a large family behind to chase the dream of a better life, these participants seemed to have much experience walking away from something or someone. For Ricardo that seems to have been his family. He said, “I left my family behind. It seems like I’ve always been leaving the family behind. Physically, family might be away but they have always been in my heart.” Claudia spoke very emotionally about her island, Puerto Rico, a place that she had to leave behind in order to find her destiny. She expressed that “Aunque no viva en mi isla, yo siempre la he tenido en mi corazón. [Even though I do not live on my Island, I have always had it in my heart.]” Soaked in emotion, these words speak of the yearning for the place where she grew up and the one that she walked away from over three decades ago.

Sometimes walking away was a defense mechanism learned early on. Marlena said that her parents taught her to ignore negative comments and return disrespect with respect. Marlena was the participant who walked away from the presence of drugs in her environment without ever experimenting with them. This same person learned to walk away from the bullies who teased her when she moved to Puerto Rico trying to get the new girl in town to fight back. Emma did the same when girls in her new neighborhood tried to engage her and her sister in an altercation. The strangers followed Emma and her sister home. This was scary because they were living at the time in a city where violence bears the distinction of being one of its oldest and most infamous residents. On that afternoon the girls were alone and their parents were both at work. The girls were alone
at home when some other girls pounded on the door, cursing disrespectfully. They locked
the door, realizing that the other girls were about to get violent with them. They never
told their parents and avoided the violent girls in the neighborhood and in school.

Emma and her sister relied on themselves to resolve the issue. They did not give
the incident the energy to take on a life of its own. Later it would be that self-reliance
which led Emma to terminate her engagement with her fiancée after concluding that they
did not see eye to eye regarding significant issues. She thought those differences would
have doomed the marriage from its inception. Emma had wanted to start her life with her
new husband as financially stable as possible. He had written Emma a letter expressing
that he wanted a huge wedding. Emma felt that a big wedding would have been a waste
of money that could have gone towards purchasing their first home. She made a
telephone date with him, and when he insisted that they have a big wedding, not listening
to her logic that the money would be better used to save for a house of their own, she
realized how different they were and sent him back his engagement ring, breaking it off.
“What was I? I think I was 22.” Emma was not the partying type and she was frugal with
her money. Her husband-to-be loved big parties, no matter how financially impractical.
She saw these as irreconcilable differences and opted to walk away. In the midst of all
this arose the opportunity for a trip that would later change her life.

Viviana knew that her mother would not be happy with the announcement that
she was moving out of the house. She had returned from her stay in college and
desperately wanted to regain the freedom that she had savored during her time away from
home. When her mother said she could leave but that she was on her own, she did just
that. She took a job as a nanny/house-sitter for a wealthy family and got a taste of luxury
that would motivate her to continue working towards becoming an independent career woman.

I did that through college and they really were a very supportive family and would let me stay there. They would go away on vacation during the summertime and I would be like their house sitter and I would live in this luxurious mansion with Benzes and this and that for like months at a time. I mean this was great. This is exactly what I needed at the time because not only did my bills get paid, but I was also kind of back and forth in between these two crazy lives. I was living in this little ghetto apartment with hand-me-downs, nothing matched, to this amazing, luxurious lifestyle that I was like “Oh yeah, this is definitely how I want to be one day.”

Viviana had to walk away from what she knew and venture into a new world where she experienced a life that she had never been exposed to before. Viviana got married in her twenties and her marriage ended in divorce, she reported being very satisfied with her life. At the time of her participation in this study she had a job she loved, she traveled frequently, and although she had yet to become a rich woman, she counted her riches in the measure of peace, fun, and freedom that she got to enjoy.

**Persistence.** To never give up seemed to be a hallmark of these participants’ approach to life. Nonnegotiable dreams of forward and upward movement seemed to fuel the persistence of these individuals. According to the participants in this study, persistence constituted a driving force which led them to overcome their odds at different times of their lives. They believed that this personal attribute was a source of their
resilience. For example, Dalia said, “Basically I think that’s what’s helped me too, to be resilient because I just don’t let things get to me. If I see something, I want to overcome it. I don’t care what it takes. I’ll do whatever.”

Certainly Marlena, who shared her suspicion of having some sort of speech impediment that was never dealt with, could have given up on education and a better future. Her mobility from the Mainland to the Island seemed to exacerbate her language difficulties. She said, “It was at the same time hard because you don’t learn either language.” Albeit difficult and at times grueling, she pressed on and managed to complete her bachelor’s degree in Puerto Rico and later a master of education at a university in the U.S. At the time of this study, she held various certifications and endorsements. For her, more than a status symbol, education became the ticket to the life that she wanted for her and her nuclear family. Her persistence seemed to have paid off as she felt that she had attained exactly what she wanted. As Julia said, “You have to be the best that you can with the tools that you have. If you don’t do what you have to do for yourself, you get nowhere.” As a case in point, Ricardo did what he had to do for himself.

Ricardo wanted more from life. He left the familiar surroundings of his home town in the lush mountains of Puerto Rico to help a sibling move with her children to the U.S. Once in the U.S., the vision of new horizons lured him to remain, a decision that would change the course of his life. Never again would he feel comfortable settling for the simple life he once knew. Notwithstanding, the struggles he faced were not for the faint of heart and many may have given up and returned to the safe cocoon of home. Ricardo’s approach was simple. He put his eye on a prize, actively sought opportunities, and put hard work into moving in the direction of his dreams. He stated, “What I’ve got I
work for. I like to have a nice car, a nice house, but I didn’t get there over night. I took chances. Life is a gamble sometimes. Sometimes you win; sometimes you lose.”

Sometimes you lose, but you never give up, seems to be the message embedded in Ricardo’s words. Likewise, Elisa stated that part of her secret to overcoming adversity was her persistence. She said, “Ay porque soy persistente. Si me caigo, me levanto. Así que quizás eso motivó a que yo volviera a tratar y a tratar y a tratar. [Oh, because I am persistent, if I fall I get up. So maybe that motivated me to try and try and try.]”

Not giving up surfaced as a theme throughout all the interviews with each of the participants. For example, Julia insisted that the most valuable lesson she has learned and taught her children is, “To never give up. Always go further. If something stops you, continue. Pray, let God work His miracles, but continue. Never give up. Continue to do what you have to do in order to become successful.” As we can see from these quotes, giving up was never an option that these participants chose and through their persistence they found the courage and motivation to push past the discomfort and pain inherent to the adverse circumstances they overcame. Persistence was present in stories of different stages and facets of the participants’ lives. Educational and career choices were an area where persistence was prevalent. From the ones who went to college in spite of being called stupid, and losers, to those whose teachers or counselors tried to track them away from the college preparatory path, they asserted their goals, desires and self-belief. Sometimes they had to redesign their course, but in the end they all came to the place where they wanted to be and not where anyone or anything suggested they would end up.

Dalia’s persistence in pursuing an education allowed her to find her niche in a career that honored what she viewed as a very personal mission to help others. She tried
social work and nursing, but each of those professions failed to satisfy her needs and prove to be a poor fit for her. Dalia, instead of giving up, altered her course and in doing this she found her dream career in education. Similarly, Carmen persisted in following her dream of teaching, in a place where her abilities and philosophy of pedagogy could converge in an environment where she experienced satisfaction in the certainty that she was making a positive difference in the lives of others each day.

For most of the participants, owning their home came as a result of hard work and persistence. For Carolina, especially, it meant that she would not die without ever having a home to call her own as in the case of her mother. Interestingly, Carolina said that she had never really thought of herself as resilient or tenacious. She said,

I’m realizing now I am not one to give up very easily, and I think it has to do with what you’ve learned, all this resilience from other people. I’m not one to give up very easy. I came here. I said, “We’re going to have to try to make this work. If it doesn’t work, well then you know whatever, but we’re going to try to make this work.” I just did not want to give up. I cannot give up. I couldn’t give up.

Emma proved her persistence when she refused to go on disability as a result of three major surgeries. She pursued further studies after the first two major surgical interventions and she lived an independent life. When she began her teaching career, she found herself in a dilapidated room where water damage had destroyed most of the space, furniture, and materials. “The classroom I had had been sort of destroyed by a storm. Nothing was left that was standing.” These deplorable conditions did not dissuade Emma from her purpose. Because of her persistence and hard work, she became an icon of
creativity in her school and a person who inspired others to make a difference in her school. Her students’ parents decided to help improve the school site. They got together and decided to rebuild Emma’s classroom in concrete instead of wood. For the first month or so Emma taught English in a makeshift classroom in a corner of the school library. She said, “So you can imagine with a piece of board colored [painted] in black placed on two folding chairs, and trying to hold it together.” She joked that by the end of the day she would be all covered in chalk dust looking like floured pizza dough.

Emma considered this experience to be one of the happiest times in her teaching career. She felt that she had a mission. She persisted in making the best of a difficult situation and that seemingly contagious tenacity led to a common goal that she and the others working with her eventually attained. As Marlena put it, “You need to fight for what you want.” This idea of fighting for what you want goes beyond a reactionary act. It entails pushing until you break down or through the barrier obstructing your path. Being determined and persistent seemed to be a must for these individuals. Dalia expressed it in this fashion, “It takes strength, because it’s not easy. We all know that and you have to be very determined ‘cause otherwise you can sort of give up. You can get derailed; you can just get so down and depressed.” Dalia said that if we let this happen then we fail. As I closed one of the interview sessions with Julia, she said, “You should never let anything stop what you want to do in life. Just go ahead. There are a lot of things out there that would impede for you to go further, don’t let that stop you.”

The stories shared by the participants in this group suggest that they were self-reliant people. They tended to move away from the negative influences in their lives and believed that they had the power to shape their life outcomes. The manifestation of this
future-constructing power seemed to be their tenacity. The stubbornness that other people had allegedly identified in them was nothing more than their persistence in following their goals and not giving up on their dreams. Being self-reliant, however, did not mean that they acted completely independently of others. These individuals seemed to be able to connect with other people to elicit the support and resources needed to reach their goals. Human connections seemed of special importance to them, as we will see in the next section.

**Congeniality**

Wolin and Wolin’s third resiliency, “relationships,” relates to a resilient person’s ability to effectively connect with others in order to compensate for the love denied them by uncaring parents or in dysfunctional family environments. Other researchers (Garmezy, 1993; Masten 2001; Werner & Smith, 1992) have suggested that resilient children, for example, tend to have an easy temperament that may facilitate positive connections with adults and peers. The latter seemed to be true for the participants in this study. They seemed to be able to elicit positive reactions from others, thus allowing them to access needed resources. I have entitled this section *congeniality* because the participants in this study seemed to engage in a dance of sorts with people they encountered in their life journeys, sometimes leading and at other times allowing other human beings to lead them in the creation of new possibilities. Those interactions with others frequently allowed them to effectively meet new challenges and sometimes to access new dreams. The participants seemed to have developed an effective system of connecting with others. Those connections seem to have facilitated their ability to elicit
the acceptance and positive regard of others. Family, whether blood related or adoptive, was the first place where many of them experienced positive connections. Whether they described their families of origin as dysfunctional or not, these participants became people for whom family was a priority.

**Love of family.** The people in this sample talked about family and the importance that it had in their lives. We have seen that many of them from a very young age engaged in helping family. For example, Claudia lived in a home that was a hub for family members needing to access services in the town or simply needing letters read to them. Carmen, Ricardo, and Elisa recounted times spent with their grandparents. Dalia’s family participated in an annual family reunion. Claudia said that her family’s strong spiritual and moral support helped her become an independent woman. She stated that, “Mi familia es lo principal en mi vida. [My family is most important in my life.]” Marlena said, “Family is very important for me. My kids, my three kids are very important in my life.”

Ricardo admitted that having a family relationship does not come without effort. He said, “When you have family, when you have work, and when you have all their issues, it’s not easy, but nothing in life is easy. Things worth doing are worth pursuing.” In other words, he seemed to believe that family is worth the effort required to keep the relationships alive. Ricardo suggested that family orientation was a cultural phenomenon for Latinos. “That’s one of the things about Hispanics, when it comes to family; we have a tendency to stick together.” His nuclear family was his priority and a source of pride for him, and he let them know it. His photograph collection, as did the others, contained
several pictures of his family, and during his discussion of those he stated, “I take my family first. I try to get through to them that regardless of where you go, when and where, you can always come back and the family will always be there.” These statements, echoed through the voices of other participants, suggest that for the individuals in this sample, family was of utmost relevance.

With tears rolling down her cheeks, Emma told me about how she took care of her mother when she was in the hospital as a result of a terminal cancer. She had been called to teach, but had to initially decline, because she was the only daughter who lived nearby, and she felt it her loving duty to be there for her mom. She said, “I can’t do it because Mom is in the hospital and she’s gotten worse.” They did a tracheotomy on her mother so that she could breathe. “I would sleep on the floor next to her bed.”

Emma took care of her mother until the day of her death. She reported feeling like her head was in a fog for five years hence, “because I missed her so much.” Nevertheless, Emma did not sit still. She threw herself into work with her church and helping others. Taking care of one’s own family emerged across the stories of the participants. Dalia said, “I helped take care of my grandma who was sick, diabetic.” Ricardo grew up with the example that one takes care of one’s own family. “Back when I was growing up if you had a grandparent and the grandparent couldn’t take care of themselves, the grandparent would move in with you, and that’s the way you did.”

Whether they did the caregiving themselves, or whether other family members took on the main responsibility, these participants expressed a belief in taking care of one’s own family. This reaffirms the position of importance that family seemed to occupy in their lives. Dalia, her sister, and her mother got together every year to spend a weekend
somewhere, just the three of them. “We’re thinking about going to Mexico and just kind of like us three and just celebrate us.”

The participants expressed love for their families and identified their nuclear families as a source of motivation to keep working against any adversity that may come their way. They also spoke of holiday traditions and other family celebrations where acts of love and sharing permeated throughout their interactions. Thus, generosity surfaced as a significant theme in the data. Their stories were filled with instances when they exhibited generosity, not only towards family members, but also with friends and others.

**Generosity to others.** Every participant in this study spoke about sharing time and material goods with others. Claudia credited her family for teaching her about the importance of helping others. Throughout her life, Claudia’s grandmother adopted an array of elderly people and would enlist Claudia and her siblings’ help to deliver a daily three o’clock cup of coffee without fail. Hospital personnel credited her grandmother with saving a young woman’s life by stopping her attempt at suicide. Claudia described her grandmother as a little lady with a big heart, who, even as a hospital patient, had to be paged for her medications and checks because she had the habit of walking around the ward providing support to other patients. Claudia believed that her family set an example that she still followed.

Claudia expressed appreciation for being able to help an elderly couple through their individual battles with cancer. She took them to all their appointments and took care of the female after her husband’s passing until the day she died. Claudia also saved the
life of one of her students’ parents by intervening in time to get him medical help before an overdose of anti-anxiety medication claimed his life.

It was a cold winter day when Claudia decided to take one of her students home because the parent could not come to pick him up. When she arrived at the house, she found the child’s father slumped in a chair and mumbling incoherently. Rather than suggesting that the family call the doctor and then exiting the premises, Claudia called the paramedics and took steps to keep the man from falling asleep until help arrived. Later she learned that he had overdosed on prescription anti-anxiety medication and that her efforts had essentially saved his life. She said, “El padre vino a darme las gracias después. [The parent came to thank me later on.]” He apologized for what he felt had been an act of cowardice. Claudia said, “Pero llegamos a tiempo que fue lo importante — salvarle la vida. [But we got there in time and that’s what was important — to save his life.]”

The preceding story relates to generosity because another person in Claudia’s place might have been afraid to risk getting involved. What if the man’s unusual behavior had resulted from the use of an illegal substance? Could she be implicated? What if he died on the spot? Could this result in time out of work if somehow legal proceedings followed? Claudia had two children she had to get home to as they were home alone after school. She went out of her way first by taking the student home and then by assisting the family in dealing with the crisis until the situation was stabilized. Her generosity of time and her kindness literally made the difference between life and death for a family she barely knew.
Francis’s family came together every December to celebrate Christmas. A year prior to the time when I interviewed Francis he said that, “The older cousins, we did not gift ourselves. Instead we said that whatever we were going to gift, it was going to go into a fund to create a scholarship in my grandmother’s name.” Francis wanted his legacy to be that of “being a good steward.” He believed in sharing his wealth with others who were less fortunate instead of investing on things he felt were unnecessary. He said, “Our closets were bursting. Our pantries, just full of all fabulous whatever. It was like what are we leaving behind?”

Many more examples of generosity to others can be found in the data. Because many of them relate to generosity with students, I have added those stories in the section discussing the participants’ beliefs about helping students develop resilience. These individuals however, did not become generous to others as a result of their induction into the field of teaching. I submit that their capacity to be generous to others spilled into their work as educators as we will see later in this study. Let us share in one last story before we close this section.

Dalia said that she could not help but feeling empathy for others, a feeling that drove her to try to help them in every way she could. When she was a young girl her attempt to help an impoverished child who had fewer resources than she, landed her in a lot of trouble. Dalia was pretty popular in school when she befriended Anita who was very poor, “La mamá recibía cupones, [Her mother received food stamps.]” She and Dalia became very good friends. Dalia said, “She was very bright, very sweet, and I liked her. She was like one of my best friends.” Anita was a heavy set female and the brunt of jokes in school. Dalia said, “I remember, todo el mundo [everybody] used to make fun of
Dalia could not understand why the other children were so mean to the girl. Anita and Dalia were more than classmates. The two girls were members of the local Catholic church’s order of las Hijas de María [Daughters of Mary].

One day during a meeting of the Daughters of Mary, the nuns announced that the group was to be in a program and that any girl wanting to participate had to adhere to a strict dress code that required that the girls dress in white from head to toe for the occasion. Anita did not have the economic resources to comply with the requirement and Dalia knew it. She said, “They don’t really like to turn people [away] or say no, but, they are very strict, kind of rigid.” Dalia knew that as soon as the nuns found out that Anita did not have the necessary attire, the director would say, “Well, sorry, but you didn’t have the right stuff, you can’t participate.”

Dalia went home and advocated with her mother to see if she could help Anita. Dalia’s mom reminded her that if not for her aunt sewing together an outfit for her, she would have been left out of the activity too. They did not have the resources to help. Dalia proceeded to find an alternate way to help her friend. She went into her sister’s closet and pulled out a white skirt and blouse. She felt elated that she had found the solution to her friend’s problem in the form of a skirt that would probably be too long and a blouse that would barely fit but that would allow Anita to participate along with the other girls in the church activity. She said, “I don’t want this girl to be left out of the group and I don’t want people to make fun of her.” She brought Anita the clothes and she was able to participate in the activity. Anita was very grateful for Dalia’s generosity but Dalia’s sister became very upset and told her mother that Dalia had taken her clothes without asking. After the program ended Dalia was punished. She said, “Después que ella
Como el cantar del coquí

participó me metieron la pela [after she participated they gave me the beating] because I lied.”

I asked Dalia if she had regretted helping her friend after she was punished. She said that her only regret was having lied. She responded, “I always wanted to do or go the extra mile to help people out. So I have no regrets. No regrets.” She continued, “That’s something that is very, I think, deeply engrained, you know, where you see a need and you have to fill the need, to go out and do something.”

Each one of the participants reported instances where they had been generous to others. Generosity seemed to start at home for most. For example, as seen earlier, Armando dedicated the totality of his salary to support his parents and siblings when one of his parents had cancer and the other was laid off. Ricardo put his life on pause to help his sister move to the U.S. with her children. Elisa and Carmen helped care for their grandparents when they were ill. Claudia acted as an advocate for other students during her high school and college experiences. Most of the participants reported instances when they shared financial resources with others. As I mentioned earlier, stories of generosity to others involving students can be found in the section relating to the participants’ approach to helping students overcome adversity.

**Generosity of others.** It seems that for the individuals in this sample, generosity flowed both ways. They told as we discussed earlier, about the generosity of teachers, family members, and friends. Those acts of kindness proved to be lifelines as they navigated seas of uncertainty and pain. Ricardo said that resilient individuals are
Como el cantar del coquí 253

“people that have a network of individuals that will help them when they’re down. It doesn’t hurt to get somebody to give you a hand when you need it the most.”

Ricardo met several people who helped him along the way. Ricardo’s story about how he made it through basic training without knowing English will follow momentarily. He went to the local military recruiting station to see if he could find something better than the dead end minimum salary job that his brother had helped him attain. He believed that he was able to pass the test thanks to the reading and writing skills he had learned from his English teachers in Puerto Rico. Conversational English was more difficult, as he had not been exposed to the speech patterns of native speakers of English until his migration to the U.S. Here is the story.

Ricardo was able to pass the military entrance exam, and within three months he found himself in basic training trying to follow the directions of a drill sergeant whom he could barely understand. When his superior would give him an order, Ricardo would frequently do the opposite. Frustrated the man yelled, “Are you stupid or what?” Ricardo looked at him and not having understood what the man had said, answered, “Yes.” Ricardo said, “I had no clue what the heck he was saying.” When one of Ricardo’s cohorts noticed what was happening, he asked, “Ricardo, how the heck did you get into the service if you could barely understand the language?” Ricardo responded, “Hey, your guess is as good as mine, but I’m here anyway and I’ve got to do whatever it takes.” Ricardo’s new friend offered to be his guide as he could speak some Spanish and Ricardo a little English. The plan was for Ricardo to copy his peer’s responses to the drill sergeant’s directives. Ricardo said, “I did. I kept looking at him and I was able to make it through Basic Training by copying somebody else.” Being able to connect with his peer
made it possible for Ricardo to overcome a hurdle that once out of the way, opened up a path to better opportunities. Later he would find a man who as his supervisor was generous with fatherly advice and encouragement.

Ricardo said, “Mr. Landau definitely helped me out. I look back and he did help me out when I needed [it] the most. Well my father wasn’t there.” When he looked back at that time in his life, Ricardo said that it would have been nice to have a caring father to give him advice. Instead, Mr. Landau, his supervisor, stepped in and encouraged Ricardo to reach for a higher goal. He said, “He was there, and he told me ‘You can do better than what you’re doing.’ Mr. Landau was another person that kind of helped me move on.”

Julia formed such an intimate connection with the teacher who rescued her so many times from the turmoil at home that they became like family. Although it had been years since the teacher passed away, her daughter and Julia remained friends who were in close communication. “My kids and her kids are friends. It’s like it’s a family, an extended family. She doesn’t see me as a friend, she sees me as sister.”

Viviana spoke of the relationship she was able to develop with the family she worked for while in college. She expressed that they opened her eyes to a set of possibilities that she never knew existed and that discovery fueled a desire to achieve higher aspirations. Similarly, Dalia spoke of her teacher in Puerto Rico, a counselor in her community college and a dear friend and coworker, who gave her a reality check that gave way to an epiphany that transformed her life. Even though the counselor was retired and it had been many years since she had been his client, they maintained contact and visited with each other. In fact, he and his wife visited during the time when Dalia was
Como el cantar del coquí

compiling her collection of pictures for this study and she included a photo of him and his wife in her collection.

Claudia provided a great example of how connecting with other human beings helped her cope with adjusting to life in Germany. Thousands of miles away from her beloved Puerto Rico, she came up with the idea that other Puerto Ricans in the service might have been feeling as lonely as she. She and her husband decided to contact other Puerto Rican soldiers and they invited them for meals and offered them their hospitality, “como si estuvieran en Puerto Rico [as if they were in Puerto Rico.]”

Earlier Claudia had spoken about teachers with whom she connected and who helped her access the courses needed to complete a dual program in high school. Connecting with others helped Armando succeed in school and eventually access a higher education. During his first experience in a U.S. public school, he elicited the help of his peers in order to understand the teacher’s expectations and assignments. Secret notes sent back and forth served to help Armando achieve a semblance of order in the chaos represented by an environment completely unfamiliar to him. Because of his ability to connect with his peers they functioned as a portal of sorts for Armando to quickly develop his receptive English language. He said, “I understood it pretty quickly. I understood it within the first year.” Producing or speaking English came after he moved to a state where his new school system offered bilingual education services. There he was able to connect with teachers at a different level and offer his help to newcomers in their classrooms while receiving encouragement and support from his teachers—another example of a mutually beneficial relationship.
Emma encountered many struggles in her life. As a young child she spent a year in a convalescent home away from her family. Her ability to elicit positive reactions from others seemed to earn her the positive regard and friendship of the caretakers as well as her peers. This same ability allowed her to earn positive responses from her bosses and coworkers and led to many opportunities within the workplace. It was at work where she befriended a young woman who invited her to see a Christmas pageant at her church. Emma attended that church until she moved back to the U.S.

Emma’s pastor became her mentor, as he had been for other youth in his church. It was he who helped her enroll in college. College had been something that she had not considered before her trip to Jerusalem, a trip paid by the church to send Emma as her pastor’s representative. Because this story relates to teaching, I have reserved it for the section on how the participants entered into the field of education. Emma expressed being very grateful to her pastor, not only for the role he played in her becoming a teacher, but also for his and his wife’s support through Emma’s mother’s losing battle with cancer.

**Gratitude.** Words of gratitude abounded throughout the interviews with the participants in this study. They expressed gratitude for the family members who loved them, who taught them important lessons, and who served as role models and mentors. They expressed appreciation for the strangers and friends found on their paths who served as protective and guiding lights during critical times. Most of all, they expressed thanks to God. Because faith emerged as a major theme in this study, I have reserved quotes concerning the latter for the section on spirituality.
The participants in this study spoke of their achievements. They did not boast, even though they were proud of their accomplishments. They gave credit where they thought credit was due. This was interesting, because there was a level of humility that seeped through in their stories. They described personal qualities that they believed helped them resile, but in the same vein recognized that the support of others was instrumental to their breakthroughs. These feelings were evident through many of the quotes and stories contained throughout this work. From simple gestures of gratitude, like Emma’s when a driver in Jerusalem invited her to his home and his wife took her shopping, to Julia who rejoiced in being able to thank her teacher for being her inspiration, these participants seem to have expressed gratitude to others without reservation.

At the end of a day spent with a local Israeli woman whose hospitality Emma had enjoyed, Emma said, “I bought her flowers and I said thank you.” She expressed being thankful for the experiences that she had as a result of the woman’s kindness. Neither one of them spoke the other’s language, but through gestures and smiles they were able to communicate and spend a memorable time together. Julia expressed her gratitude to the teacher who had been her encourager and protector during some of the most trying times in her life. She said, “You know, it was like, that was my second mom. And I thank God that before she died, I went to visit her, [and] I told her.” Dalia was very thankful for and to the people she encountered in her life and who she believed had a positive influence in her development of resilience. She even thanked me for engaging in this work. When I asked her if there was anything that she would like to add before we closed our last interview, she said,
I thank you for the opportunity for this resiliency topic. I’m hoping, that you can bring about some awareness and open up people’s eyes about our people, our culture, and that people really learn something that’s important and that can impact the lives of our children, our adults, or culture in a positive way. So I thank you for that.

These participants’ stories suggested that they viewed themselves as interdependent entities within the realm of humanity. They felt responsible for their life outcomes, but regarded themselves as part of a whole, able to give and receive the gifts of encouragement and generosity. Francis explained it in this manner. “Because humanity has gone on forever, and it will go on forever and whatever little piece of humanity is within you is also within me, and so we flow.” Francis’s words revealed what others in the sample seemed to convey: that we travel this life together even if on independent paths, every so often converging in opportunities to lighten the load for one another. The data suggest that the realization of the need to connect with other people may have compelled the participants to actively seek to experience the gifts of giving and receiving help and encouragement. This suggests as other researchers have concluded, (Garmezy, 1993, Masten, 2009; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992) that being able to establish and appreciate positive connections with others is promotive of resilience. Hunter (2001) for example, argued that a relationship with a consistent and caring adult who could guide youth in their path to resilience seemed to act as a moderating factor that was promotive of resilience. It seemed that respect would have to exist in order for youth to be able to even begin to acknowledge the guidance of caring adults. It is possible that for that very reason respect rose as a predominant theme in the data.
Respect. For relationships to flourish respect must be present according to the participants in this study. They suggested that respect starts at home. Emma said, “I had a sense of respect in what I thought and how things should be, and maybe it’s because that’s how my father was, you know, and my mother.” Carolina said, “I was never disrespectful. That respect, all your mother needed to do was just take a look, and you straightened out.” Respect for parents, elders, teachers and peers, was a theme that surfaced frequently throughout the interviews with the participants. Most of them spoke about their respect for parents and family. The reader may recall Francis’s description of the ritual of asking for a blessing from family members or adults designated by the parents as worthy of deferring to.

Both Ricardo and Francis stated that if I had asked their parents to describe them, they would have without a doubt used the word respectful as one of the descriptors. Francis for example said, “I think they would think of me, they would say I was a good son, respectful, obedient.” Likewise Ricardo stated, “My mother would say that I was very respectful, that I was one of the best things that ever happened to her.” He went on to describe the values that his father instilled in him about respect when his was a young boy.

One thing that I can speak well of my father was his teaching that “When you look at elders you’d better respect them, respect them as who they are and respect them because they have the experience and they have the knowledge.” and I said “Fine.” So I never did have a problem dealing with other people. I never had a
problem looking up to elders and saying, “Hopefully they will help me get to where I want to go.”

If it seems to you like Ricardo had an agenda, you are probably correct in your appraisal of his words. His purpose, plain and simple, was to collect as much wisdom from his elders as he could in order to get to where he wanted to go. Similar to Julia’s idea that collecting something from every teacher she had made her who she was, Ricardo expressed having had an interest in learning from the mistakes of others and emulating positive role models. His father’s expectations for how he was to treat his elders gave way to his strategy of using their wisdom as a navigation device on his journey through life. Marlena’s parents also set the expectation for her to be respectful towards adults and others. She said that her parents taught her and her siblings about respect. They were not allowed to interject a remark in a conversation between adults. They were expected to act respectfully towards other people, especially their elders, whether or not they deemed the person or persons respectable. Marlena’s parents taught their children that if they ever needed to assert themselves with a person acting rudely towards them, that they should do it respectfully. Marlena believed that “If you respect, they’ll respect you.”

Although several of the participants self-reported as stubborn, their stories speak of respect for others. Most of them seemed to assert their beliefs in a fashion that did not provoke retaliation from authority figures because they were careful not to cross the borderline between assertiveness and disrespect. Armando said, “I was always taught to respect my elders. I was always taught also to be respected and to get my point across as nicely and positively as possible.” Claudia, for example, confronted her biological father
about his absence when she was only twelve years old. She had not seen her father until one summer at age twelve when she visited his state of residence. At first he did not even know who she was as he had not seen her since she was an infant. After her cousin made the introductions, Claudia’s father hugged and kissed her. They decided to go for a walk and that was when Claudia let her father know exactly how she felt about the things he had done. She said, “Yo le dije cómo yo me sentía. Que él nunca estuvo ahí para nosotros, que la manera que él trató a mi mamá, que fue muy abusador, pero que mi mamá nunca nos inculcó malos sentimientos hacia él. [I told him how I felt. That he was never there for us that the manner in which he treated my mother had been very abusive but that my mother never instilled in us bad feelings toward him.]” Then she proceeded to express her gratitude to him “que por lo menos tuvimos mucho amor con mis abuelos, mis tío-abuelos y mis tíos que nos apoyaron toda la vida [that at least we had a lot of love with my grandparents, grand-uncles and my uncles who supported us all our lives.]”

Claudia’s father was still living at the time of this study and she communicated with, and visited him whenever possible as they did not reside in the same state. She treated him with respect and seemed to have earned his. Emma spoke about respect for the elderly. “Your elderly need to be respected, need to be helped because they were part of society and they did for society, and it’s supposed to be a cycle.” Most of the time we hear about the cycle of respect as you give respect to get respect, but here Emma spoke of a different cycle. Her words suggested that respect acts like a compelling force that directs us to take care of rather than abandon our elders.

Dalia seemed to view respect as a direct result of one’s sense of responsibility and admitting to one’s mistakes. She stated, “I take responsibility for my own behavior, and I
think that is one of the biggest things that has helped me throughout life. I mean honestly. I’ve earned a sense of respect because of that.”

Emma recalled an instance when she felt that she taught a boss some respect. It was nearing Christmas when Mrs. Hagler, the senior secretary at the firm for which Emma worked, came to see her with a special request. Mr. Camargo was the president of the company and a man who had the reputation of an ogre. His latest secretary had quit the job leaving Mrs. Hagler desperately needing someone bilingual to act as Mr. Camargo’s interim secretary. She approached Emma with the hope that she would agree to take on the challenge. Emma agreed after cautioning Mrs. Hagler that she would not put up with Mr. Camargo’s disrespectful behavior. She said, “Just as long as he doesn’t scream at me, because I’m not hiding underneath the rug.”

On the morning of her first day working for Mr. Camargo, he came in without greeting anyone, walked into his office, and began giving orders from behind his desk. Emma got up and walked into his office with her stenographer’s pad in hand. She said, “First of all, good morning to you, although I was not the one that came in. It was you. Second of all, you’re all the way in there. I can’t hear you.” She sat in front of him and said, “Now tell me, repeat what you want. What is it that you were saying to me?” Emma completed all the tasks that Mr. Camargo asked her to do that day. Mrs. Hagler sat at her desk wondering what Emma had said while in the man’s office that morning. Emma passed by Hagler’s desk and said, “We’re doing fine.” To everyone’s surprise, on his way out at the end of the day, Mr. Camargo turned to Emma and said, “See you tomorrow.” Emma said, “So we had an understanding.” Emma had been quick to establish the
relationship parameters with Camargo and in the process, as she put it, taught him some manners.

If the reader were to come face to face with Emma he or she would very easily picture her in this scenario. Emma, as well as most of the participants in this sample, seemed to consider respect as a cornerstone of any productive relationship. Respect surfaced again in conversations about students and traits, skills or elements that these educators believed they needed in order to develop resilience. The sample in this study suggested that giving and receiving respect are paramount to making connections with others who can help an individual in his or her pathway to resilience.

**Enterprise**

Wolin and Wolin (1993) described the resiliency of “Initiative” as “the determination to assert yourself and master your environment” (p.136). These researchers posed that resilient survivors travel through several phases as they mature and that during each one of them the person displays signs of their initiative. Resilient survivors tend to identify a part of their existence that they can control and invest energy in it which purportedly allows them to find something that they can feel proud of. They relish in problem solving and generating solutions. The participants in this study seemed to value problem solving. The data suggest that they frequently engaged in strategizing their way to where they needed to go in order to reach their goals. They firmly believed in their power to impact their outcomes in life which seemed to frequently become an adventure into the unknown requiring large investments in terms of time, energy and the belief in our own ability to succeed. For this reason I have entitled this theme, enterprise.
Internal locus of control. William Ernest Henley’s poem *Invictus*, (www.poemhunter.com/poem/invictus/) I believe, offers a very accurate picture of this subtheme. The last two lines of the poem, “*I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul*” have represented a mantra for me since I first read it during my first year of college in Puerto Rico. Hearing the stories of the participants in this study, reminded me of those lines. This is not to say that they did not believe in the power of a higher being—far from it, as we will see when we discuss the theme of spirituality. Notwithstanding, these participants strongly believed that they possessed within themselves the power to impact their life outcomes. In their estimation, nobody but they could tear their inner happiness asunder or rebuild that which might be broken in order to transform their dolor into glee.

The participants in this study presented many of the characteristics that Reis et al. (2005) reported in their study of the high achieving, ethnically diverse participants in their sample. They found that their participants had a high sense of self-efficacy, were success driven, independent, and sensitive. They had an internal locus of control and an appreciation for cultural diversity. The data suggest that participants in this study shared these characteristics. They had aspirations for success, as evidenced by their pursuit of a higher education. Their attempts to improve their circumstances suggest a high sense of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control. They were sensitive and seemed to have an appreciation for cultural diversity that was especially evident in their interactions with students. You will have the opportunity to see how sensitivity and appreciation for cultural diversity emerge from their stories in the section regarding teaching. For now, let us take a look at the theme at hand.
Emma said that the difference between those who rise above adversity and those who do not, “I think it’s how much drive you have. How much is it that you want to get there?” Claudia stated her conviction that success and the attainment of a person’s desires are dependent on that person and no one else. She later stated that you do need support but that, as she said earlier, success is contingent on the choices we make. “Sí se puede. Tú te puedes superar y tener lo que tú deseas en esta vida. Seguir hacia adelante y triunfar porque aquí todo el mundo tiene una oportunidad, la misma oportunidad. [Yes, one can. You can succeed and have what you desire in this life. Continue moving forward and triumph because here, everyone has an opportunity, the same opportunity.]”

Claudia came to the U.S. speaking broken English, but not with a broken spirit. She had a passion for helping people who were new to the country because she knew how difficult it was to transition from one culture into another. After all, she had ample experience with that phenomenon during her three year stint in Germany. The belief that anyone who wants to succeed can, served as a guiding value in her quest for success as well as in her work with students. Claudia started off as an instructional aide with just two years of college. She refused to let the fact that her limited English, her sons’ chronic asthma, and not having family in her new city to support her, stop her from pursuing her goals. She juggled the responsibilities of a job and a home, knowing that it would take her longer than the average person who could afford to take more than just Saturday courses. Even though years later her marriage would end in divorce, she felt proud of all she had been able to attain with little help. Her following statement speaks to her sense of self-reliance and her internal locus of control.
Yo he tenido que tener dos o tres trabajos para poder mantener mi hogar, pero han sido trabajos muy honrados. Yo siempre estaré orgullosa de que a pesar de que yo me divorcié y no tenía ninguna ayuda, yo pude mantener mi hogar sin necesidad de conseguir otra persona que me ayudara.[I have had to keep two or three jobs to support my home, but they have been very honest jobs. I will always be very proud that even though I got divorced and didn’t have any help, I was able to support my home without having the need to find another person to help me.]

Marlena stated that nobody could make her do anything that she did not want to do. She believed that people make choices, suggesting that we all have the power to reject bad influences if we so choose. She said that a person’s life outcome depended on his or her choices. She said, “There are always consequences.” She believed that nobody has the power to make a person make poor choices. She stated that “If I say no, it’s no. I don’t need to please anybody. That’s how I see it. I am who I am, and if you like me, you like me and if you don’t, too bad.” Marlena suggested that making poor decisions and then blaming others for them was a poor excuse for someone who wanted to head in the wrong direction. In her estimation, bad outcomes result from bad choices.

Ricardo could have comfortably stayed in a world that was familiar to him and not choose to go in search of something better. You may recall that he barely spoke a word of English when he came to the U.S. fresh out of high school. His brother could not believe his ears when, seemingly out of the blue, Ricardo asked him to accompany him into a military recruiting station. How could this be? He did not speak English.
I was walking down the streets in Michigan, because I left here in ’77, the winter of ’77, one of the worst winters in the Midwest. So I went to Michigan to live with my brother and you know as his brother, he helped me get a job, but when you get a job and you don’t know the language, I ended up working in a place where it was nothing more than like, a second Puerto Rico all together. Latinos have a tendency to stick together, and so I started working with them and yes, they had a bunch of them working together, but they were paying them minimum wage, and I said “You know this is not for me. At minimum wage, at $3.80 an hour, this doesn’t cut it.” And I was walking with my brother, and I saw the Military Recruiting Office, and I said “Hey, you want to go in there?” He looked at me and said “Why?” I said, “I want to see what I can do, if they can actually help me out.”

This marked the beginning of a successful five year military career for Ricardo. The rest of the story and how he managed that pertains to the section on congeniality that the reader encountered earlier in this work. The point here is that Ricardo seemed to have a sense of agency that led him to try something new rather than draw contentment from the familiar. He felt that he could do something to improve his chances of, as he frequently put it, “moving up.”

Carmen was a teacher in Puerto Rico before she came to live in the U.S., but when she arrived in her new state of residence, she found that she needed to complete several courses before she could be certified to teach in that state. After all her children were in school, Carmen reached out by offering to volunteer there. The offer was ignored.
Carmen felt that she had much to offer her children’s school. Even though she was an experienced teacher offering free services, she felt her services were not welcomed because of her heavy accent. She said, “But with my accent, nobody needed me.” Still, her belief that she could contribute to the school environment compelled her to again reach out, this time, with an idea for a reading incentives program. After Carmen wrote the proposal and had secured pledges from local businesses for free books for students, the principal vetoed the program. Shot down a second time, she decided that she would do what she could, which was to pull her children out of the public school and send them to the local private school. From her perspective, it was the public school’s loss. She taught courses at a university, but was unsatisfied. Later, a visit to observe a bilingual science class pointed her in the direction of the place where she would once again find joy in her career.

Carmen had a specific school in mind and she believed that she would make it there. She said, “It was a really good school and that’s where I wanted to teach. I wanted to teach at that school, at Robert Waters because that school was multicultural.” She decided that she would answer only the call from the principal of her dream school. Carmen was so sure of her ability to do well in both interviews required to get the job, that she did not consider other options. When Mr. Irvin, Robert Waters School principal called Carmen for an interview, she did not hesitate and went in with complete faith in her ability to pass the interview. She did. “That’s how I got to Robert Waters.”

Emma learned typing and shorthand in high school. While her sister completed high school, Emma went to work. She recalled having a level of self confidence that allowed her to attend an interview for a job she truly wanted at the time with the certainty
that she would get it. She was not even eighteen. She entered boldly, as if her prospective employer had been expecting her with bated breath, and declared, “Here I am.” The manager asked her, “Well you know how to type?” and she responded in a dignified manner, “Oh give me a typewriter.” Emma confessed, “That’s what I really wanted to do, and so I began and I worked there until the day I was 21.”

Viviana had a plan from early on to change her life circumstances, not only for herself, but also for her family. She said that she felt she had to get out of her home situation in order to help herself and everybody in her path. Viviana stated that she felt an unrelenting drive to get away from her stepfather’s abuse. She said, “Throughout my childhood I always remember like ‘I’ve got to get out of this. We’ve got to make it better. I have to make it better for me, for my brother, for everybody else.’” Viviana self-identified as resilient because she felt that she had “that fight” that she had not been able to see in her sibling. She said, “So I just, I wanted it for both of us.”

As it turned out, Viviana achieved her goal of putting distance between her and her stepfather. Her brother eventually followed his own path to independence, but Viviana was the sibling with the highest level of education and salary at the time of this study. She lived on her own, but visited her mother frequently. Her stepfather was no longer in the picture.

Julia became the only one of her siblings to obtain a college education. She told me that one of her sisters still resented her for being the only one in her immediate family with a professional degree. For Julia it was hard to comprehend why her sister resented her success, as she believed that each one of them made the choices which led to where they were at the time of this study. Julia stated her thoughts on that matter: “Everybody
has a chance to better themselves. It all depends how you look at life and what you do for yourself.” Julia felt that her sibling could have chosen to obtain an education rather than trying to escape their father’s abuse by choosing marriage over school. Julia believed that walking away from one’s problems was just a temporary fix. She said, “You can walk away from it, but what are you going to do to make yourself better so that that won’t affect you later on?”

Even though pursuing a higher education came with the additional cost of feeling ostracized by her sister, Julia stood by her choices and the belief that life is what you make of it and that change for the better requires effort. Additionally, Julia’s words point to a belief that the other participants professed: Facing problems and working on resolving them is a better option than running away from them or ignoring their existence. Ricardo said that “Changes don’t come easy, but it’s up to you to make the changes.” Life for these resilients seemed to be a thing they did rather than something that was done to them. Although Ricardo subscribed to the idea that you decide what you want to do with your life—he mentioned destiny; others called it life, or even God. Albeit independent and self-directed, they acknowledged that unforeseen circumstances occur, but also stood firm in the belief that it is what a person does with the hand they’re dealt that determines his or her outcomes.

Julia’s words sum up the attitude of self-reliance that permeates the stories of this group of participants; “I just try to do whatever I have to do for myself.” Dalia said, “I didn’t blame my parents. I didn’t blame anybody.” Carmen asserted that, “You need to realize and you need to take the blame game out of it. I still have the power. I have the agency to do some changes. I cannot stand still [and] just let life happen to me.”
Across the board, the act of blaming did not seem to claim a prominent spot in the lives of these resilients. For them, life happens and we have the power to change our destinies. They based this opinion on the certainty derived from their experiences. That is, that we are equipped to yield a satisfactory outcome if we make right choices and press forward with unrelenting determination.

**Assertiveness and determination.** Determination, perseverance, persistence, and assertiveness seemed to compose a harmonizing quartet in the lives of the participants in this study. They do, at least as far as the data from this study suggest. They shared stories about times when they asserted themselves with their parents, teachers and even bosses. Claudia and Emma represented two good examples of assertiveness with an authority figure, as we saw earlier. Carmen’s and Dalia’s refusal to allow school personnel to track them in anything less than a college preparatory program represent yet two others. Although Marlena may not have chosen the best words when she told her teacher that “she could go straight to hell” she too, and at a very young age, asserted her right to feel safe and secure in the classroom. Julia asserted her right to pursue an education with odds stacked against her. She said that although some may view poverty as a barrier that could impede a person from obtaining an education, “Against all odds, you’re going to overcome that, and you’re going to become that professional, no matter what it takes to become a professional. You could be poor, and you could really achieve.” She managed to go to college, and as you may recall, proved to her alcoholic father that she was not stupid and incapable of reaching her goal of becoming a professional. When she found herself immersed in an abusive relationship, her determination to complete her degree
empowered her to press on. She said, “I wanted to be someone, wanted to become someone. And I went through a lot of things in my life. He was a jealous man.” Julia’s husband’s jealous fits would result in arguments and abuse each time she attended her college courses. “So, and I said, no, I’m going to do whatever I have to do, regardless. He could beat me up every day and I’m going to go to school.”

Determination and assertiveness required courage. Julia had risked physical pain to achieve her goal of becoming a professional, which seemed to speak to the intensity of her desire to reach her goals. Her advice to her own children was to never give up. Every single one of the participants’ stories pointed to determination and assertiveness as present in their lives. Based on the data collected from the stories of these participants, I believe that it is possible that optimism fed their determination and assertiveness. Optimism is hope, in my estimation. The next section explores what the participants had to say about this salient theme.

**Optimism.** Looking at the bright side, seeing the glass as half full, focusing on a cloud’s silver lining, or believing that after the rain, a rainbow will appear, carrying the promise of a pot of gold at the other end. All these clichés seem to capture how the participants in this study approached life. Optimists par excellence, their positive outlook came across during most of the interviews. For example, while discussing her collection of photographs for this study, Elisa noticed that most of the photos depicted something positive. Even her divorce papers represented something good because as she said that she entered “una fase nueva en mi vida. Iba a hacer las cosas por mí sola. No iba a estar acompañada pero iba a estar más tranquila y mejor. Es la parte alegre lo que me
acuerdo de eso.” [a new phase in my life. I was going to do things on my own. I was not
going to be accompanied, but I was going to be more tranquil and better off. It is the
happy part what I remember about that.]

She added that she liked to stay positive as much as she could and that she tended
to forget negative things and that she tried “de poner las cosas positivas primero antes
que las negativas o tirarle tierra encima a las negativas. [to put the positive things before
the negative or bury the negatives.]” Elisa’s philosophy was that one has to be strong to
overcome bad things because behind each bad thing that occurs there are about ten
positive ones that follow. Similarly, Viviana said, regarding her divorce, that for her, it
was a reason to celebrate and not a motive for people to pity her.

Julia stated, “I think I’m an optimist. I always see the good in things, and I try to
go forward.” She claimed the belief that obstacles in life can only make a person
stronger. Similarly, Emma said that in life “there will be problems, but you have to think
‘I’ll get out of here soon. I’ll be able to do something for myself,'” Perhaps that optimism
is what kept Emma from falling apart during her extended hospital stay when she was
nine and then later on in life helped her cope with two major surgeries that took place
within a three month span. She said, “I’ve come to understand that situations don’t last a
lifetime.” In her estimation, one has to sometimes ride adversity just like one would a hot
air balloon—hanging in until it comes down because “it would be in your best interest to
stay hanging on.” A prevalent thought for her seemed to be, “I’m going to try again and
it’s going to be better.” According to these participants, whether life is good or not is a
matter of perspective. For example, Ricardo said,
You have to be optimistic. You know? Again, don’t look at the glass half empty because that brings you down. Deal with what you have. I look back. There was this card that I was reading about this person that used to cry because he didn’t have shoes until he saw somebody that had no feet, and that’s what I say, you know yeah, sometimes we complain that we don’t have this, we don’t have that, but when you are in a situation like that, and that’s the motto that I live by; I say “Look behind you, and when you think you’re doing bad, there’s a lot of people that are doing worse than you are,” and you know sometimes that’s what you need. That’s the only thing you need just to keep you going. When you take a step back, it gives you a different perspective in life. That gives you that extra energy that you need to move on.

Carolina said that nothing is so bad that it cannot be overcome. Dalia shared an important lesson that she believed life taught her. She claimed that with the passage of time and from her experiences with adversity, she learned that staying positive was the only way that she could make it can get through life. Dalia believed that negativity just served to bring a person down and stifle his or her progress toward reaching a goal. She said, “I like to remain optimistic always positive.”

Viviana said that she had thought about her brother and reached the conclusion that perhaps they took different paths and approaches to life based on their individual perspectives. Other participants made similar comments during their interviews. Ricardo said that he realized that there was nothing he could do to change his siblings’ perceptions of how things were when they were growing up because they were a result of their perspective and he believed that no one could change that for them. He chose,
However, to put a positive spin on things, viewing adversity as a stepping stone rather than as a definite halt on the path to a satisfactory life.

Marlena also spoke about perspective and optimism. “What could be negative for me could be a positive for another person or vice versa. I was taught that even though you have negative around you, you always try to get the positive out of it.” She reflected on her journey and added that “it was not easy.” She doubted that “a lot of people could do what I have done, but you have to be positive. You’ll always have to aim for, like I said before, and just go for what you want.”

It seems that for Marlena, looking for the positive in every situation helped her stay focused on her goals. Optimism came forward as a staple in the daily lives of the participants. Being optimistic seemed to usher in the ineffable hope that their dreams and aspirations were attainable. Most dreamed of having a place to call home. Most aspired to attain a level of education that would facilitate their exodus out of poverty and the entrance into a world that until then had existed only in their visualizations of a higher quality of life.

Risk-taking. If optimism provided the participants with the unshakable belief that a better life was possible, risk-taking represented the actions born out of that hopeful attitude. Most of the people in this group found themselves facing circumstances that called for the courage to take leaps into the unknown—for example, leaving marital relationships, albeit familiar, to step out into a world void of recognizable faces and comforting customs. Having to summon up from the depths of their psyches a foreign language that until then had only existed on the pages of school books, and in hidden
memories of long forgotten lessons, they charged in. From their stories, we access windows through which vignettes of courage play out. We see the young man who insisted on enlisting in the military in search of increasing his chances for a better life, even though he did not speak English. A picture comes into view of the young woman whose husband’s jealous tantrums made her daily homecoming from college as risky a venture as stepping into a pit of rattlesnakes day after day. We find scenes of little girls and boys stung by the absence of one or both parents, others burned by the blaze of domestic violence and physical abuse. Some were children growing up in environments with poor health care, strapped down by the ties of poverty and the disdain of prejudice. We see children who doctors had suspected would either be impaired for life, or not even make it to adulthood. Undeterred, they pushed and pulled, exercising their desire to thrive, and they lived to tell stories of personal triumphs and not stories of defeat. They were risk takers who challenged the odds. Here some of their thoughts about risks and risk taking.

Ricardo did not see himself as much of a risk taker. His life story suggested otherwise, as others observed and pointed out to him.

When you look back at my life, somebody said, because I keep saying that I was afraid to take chances, the person said “What do you mean that you’re afraid to take chances? You’ve been taking chances all your life,” and I said “What do you mean I’ve been taking chances all my life?” “Yes. You came over to this country. You didn’t know the language. You joined the [military].”

According to Ricardo, his system was simple, in that he took measured risks. He claimed that, “I control what I do after carefully considering the risks and benefits. If I
succeed, I move on to the next task, but if I fail, I evaluate my course of action and learn from my mistakes.” Ricardo’s daughter was given an assignment to write an essay about an influential person in her life. She chose Ricardo. He said, “You know, something like that is worth all the risks that you take in life.”

Emma, who was no stranger to the concept of taking risks, said that in order to overcome adversity a person must be “able to see and seize the moment of an opportunity and take the risk.” She took a huge risk when she submitted herself to a surgical procedure that at the time was experimental; it helped her reclaim her mobility and independence. She risked regret when she decided to break off her engagement. Emma set out in the world with the courage of one whose convictions weigh on her choices so strongly that even when the outcome may not turn out as expected, she could move on without lamenting what could have been.

Emma had taken many risks in her life. Imagine visiting the Middle East at age 22 and going off with a cab driver to visit his home and go shopping with his wife, who by the way, did not speak your language nor you hers. During that trip, Emma found items that she still treasured at the time of the interview, and most of all, she experienced a new culture for which she developed a deep respect and appreciation. She discovered a passion for teaching during that same unforgettable trip that began with her taking the risk to travel to a country where four years prior a massacre had claimed the lives of many tourists.

Sometimes, risk-taking took the form of confronting abusive or neglectful parents. Other times it took the form of reaching out to help someone in need. Not all participants experienced risk-taking in the same manner, but they all stood firm, in that the choices
they made were ones that they could live with. The risk-taking in this group seemed to be driven by their unrelenting determination to attain their goals, and to a system of beliefs where the right thing outweighs the immediate benefits of never stepping out of their comfort zones. Although the term may elicit a mental picture of daredevils defying gravity, these risk takers seemed to be analytical thinkers driven by a sense of purpose, and focused on the ultimate goal of making life better for themselves and others.

**Imagination**

Wolin and Wolin (1993) said that the resiliencies they identified as humor and creativity have constructive power. These researchers posed that creativity and humor allow resilient people to find a safe place within them where they can organize their existences in a satisfying manner and out of potentially destructive circumstances create a thing of beauty. They argued that creativity and humor are conceived in the individual’s imagination. Thus I have entitled this section simply, imagination.

**Inventiveness.** Out of the pit of necessity something of value emerges. The participants in this study were very creative individuals. For example, Francis dabbled in photography. He frequently created his own stationery, using photographs of his travels as the backdrop for inspirational sayings and letters to friends and relatives. His office walls displayed several original posters. He also had a special talent for planning social events. His ability to produce an array of accents on call made him a very entertaining speaker. He loved poetry, music, and the theater. Quite the storyteller, during our time together, he reeled me in with his stories and treated me to a wonderfully emotive ride
down his memory lane. Francis’s stories were sprinkled with references to writers, actors, artists, athletes, and historical figures.

Ricardo expertly weaved into his stories the adages and metaphors that carried special meaning for him throughout his life. His area of expertise required constantly coming up with creative solutions to the tasks at hand. He had to not only be able to think outside the box, but he worked to help his students develop those skills.

Carmen was an avid writer. Her writing style, much like that of bell hooks, who was one of her favorite authors, centered on critical theory. Her interest in this line of thought came as a result of her trying to make sense of the place she occupied within U.S. society as a Puerto Rican woman.

Her discoveries during a course taken for her master’s degree, compelled her to read more, and thus inspired her to put in writing the insights she acquired. For her photograph collection, Carmen exceeded my request. She put together a PowerPoint presentation, complete with captions, describing how the enclosed photos related to her resilience.

Julia and Dalia seemed to be the culinary experts in the group. They both loved to entertain, and they both created dishes to delight and celebrate friends and relatives. One was also a professional baker, a skill that she learned from a relative she would sometimes visit with when she was a young girl. Julia also sewed, a skill her mother taught her, which proved priceless when she needed clothes to wear to college and buying clothes off the rack was not an option.

Although Marlena never took an interior decorating class, she seemed to have a special talent for flower arranging and for interior decorating. She made the arrangements
and all the decorations for her daughter’s wedding. She loved to entertain and she enjoyed frequently updating the look of her home. Her residence looked like a picture out of any one of the popular decorating magazines available in newsstands. She claimed that she got bored if things remain unchanged for too long. Marlena included a picture of her home in her photo collection. She told me that she had owned three homes in her lifetime and that of the three, the one she occupied during the time of this study, was very special to her. This was her family’s dream home and where she hoped to finish raising her children and later visit with her grandchildren. The house was of special significance because she and her husband “met since we were young and we accomplished everything we have together and this is one of our dreams we accomplished. We’re very proud of our home. I love it, and I have it blessed by God.”

In this group, creativity seemed to be alive and well. They were teachers, leaders, dancers, and creators of beautiful things. They seemed to possess an imaginative power that found beauty in the mundane and humor even in the dreariest of days they remembered. This leads us to the subtheme of humor.

**Humor: Funny side up.** Believe it or not, laughter emerged as a mainstay during the interviews with the participants in this study. Although as the reader can imagine, and as Dalia said, the memories accessed during their participation were at times “very painful,” the incidence of laughter outnumbered the times when tears entered the scene. For example, Dalia assured me that, “Something that is like ‘¡Oh, qué drama! [Oh what drama!]’ I make something fun out of it. I joke. I laugh and I’m like, ‘Well it could’ve been worse.’ So I’m always being funny or sarcastic about it.” She had recently
experienced a death in her family. After the burial, she got together with her family and decided to celebrate the opportunity to be in each other’s company. Amidst the sad feelings for the loss of her aunt, Dalia and her family found a reason to rejoice.

We had not been together since 1976, in Puerto Rico so this was very unique, special, not just because of the death of my aunt, but that she brought us together, not just our kids, our family, our siblings, but she brought in many of the other family that had not been there together as one unit. It was amazing. My aunt was something else. We got together after we cried and we thanked the good Lord for my aunt and for the wonderful things that she did, we went to San Juan as she would’ve wanted us to do. She liked el Viejo San Juan [Old San Juan], so we all went in her memory, right? And we just took the little trolley and we ate and we sang and we prayed just as a family.

Sometimes humor averted fear, as in the following story, where Claudia and a friend had gotten lost in a mountainous state in the U.S. Having no clue of where they were headed deep in a mountainous region, Claudia and her friend, another Puerto Rican woman, stopped in what looked like a national park to ask for directions. They found a large group of people gathered around a bonfire. From the sounds emanating from their direction, alcohol consumption may have been part of the reason for their celebratory iterations. Claudia said that when she and her friend saw the bonfire and the group of people who were standing around it, they began to shake. Claudia imagined that if she opened her mouth and the people camping there heard her accent, she would surely be the first to be cast into the fire. Claudia could pass for Caucasian as long as she did not speak. Her friend did not speak with an accent, but her phenotype was what people generally
identified as Latino. She said that she told her friend to walk behind her in case they were stopped. She told the other woman, “Yo hago la mimica y tú hablas porque tú no tienes acento. [So I will lip-synch and you speak because you don’t have an accent.]” The absurdity of the plan Claudia proposed made her and her friend laugh at themselves and while still frightened, they managed to remain calm and leave the area with a story that years later still elicited a belly laugh from Claudia and possibly from her friend. She said, “El humor nos sirvió para salir de esa situación.[humor served us in getting out of that situation.]”

Elisa credited her sense of humor with seeing her through many tough times. “Como dicen, ‘Al mal tiempo, buena cara.’ Tratar de reír más de lo que uno llora. Yo creo que el humor me ha ayudado mucho a superar cosas malas. [As they say, ‘Keep a good face in bad weather.’ (to smile in the face of adversity) To try to laugh more than one cries. I think that humor has helped me a lot to overcome bad things.]” Emma said, “I always had a joke.” Making a joke every so often made work a fun place to be for Emma.

One of the issues that each one of the participants had dealt with at one time or another related to the stereotypes about Puerto Ricans that, according to them, abound. Ricardo, for example, could have chosen to act out of feeling offended by the fact that a lunch lady mistook him for an over-aged high school student. Nevertheless, he thought it was at least in part funny that her demeanor towards him changed only after she found out he was a teacher there. The cafeteria worker had seen Ricardo purchase lunch on a daily basis for about two years. One day she said to him, “You know it seems like you’ve been coming over here for almost two years. When are you going to finish what you’re doing?” Ricardo was puzzled. He explained that he was a teacher at the school and not a
student. The woman’s demeanor toward Ricardo seemed to take a turn toward the positive on the spot. He said, “It’s sad how soon a person changes how they treat you. The way she looked at me all of a sudden changed and a lot of Latinos go through that. You know, people treat you differently.”

It turned out that the man the lunch lady assumed was a Latino male, perhaps not smart enough to ever complete high school, was a teacher there. Even though Ricardo found it sad that sometimes people treat others purely based on stereotypes, his ability to find the humor in the situation seemed to soften the blow of the insult.

When Marlena described an instance when her mother struck her with a cable, causing her eye to swell, she simply said, “I guess she was fed up and she just grabbed the cable and just started hitting, and I was the lucky one.” The lucky one? Can anyone imagine making a joke out of something like that? For these participants, not engaging in reframing the sad events in their lives through humor could have been a costly venture if we think of the alternatives. Instead of internalizing those negative events, these participants redefined them in a manner which seemed to strip those negative events of their potentially destructive power. This seems fortunate, as the alternative might have left the participants cloaked in perennial victimization that might have rendered them defeated rather than resilient.

The participants in this study seemed to have the capacity to laugh at themselves and to utilize humor to combat sadness and even fear. Even though they had shed their share of tears, somehow along the way, they discovered a saving grace in actively searching for the positives in every situation and if in doing that, they found a budding giggle or a laugh, then all the better.
Little Francis had not been feeling well. His father, who had bought tickets to take him on a visit to the United Nations building, insisted on taking the child there against Francis’s mother’s vehement protests. Francis told the story, complete with sound effects. Let us just say that his stomach was not well. Not only did he find himself expelling gas in the room for national security, but later he would get sick in the restroom after finally admitting to his dad that he was not feeling well. Looking back at that day he said,

It’s true they probably said “You know that kid, I think he raised a stink at the UN,” but I never forgot it, and I learned that sometimes we have to pull all our energy, regardless of from where you have to get it, and see yourself to that goal that you might have been committed to, regardless. But resilient people can live through a personal tragedy, like oh my God! Your ego gets so burst, you know, it could just get so busted. It’s like oh my God, how embarrassing! And then resilient people can laugh at themselves, bellyache laugh. It may not be funny at the moment, but eventually you just see the humor in it and you just want to die [laughing].

Francis said it best. At least for the sample in this study, Francis’s appraisal of what resilient people do seemed adequate. He had this to say about humor. “Humor provides the mask needed to disguise the hurt or the disappointment and it provides a moment to heal, lick your wounds, and charge right back into battle.” Similarly, apparently at the time of our interviews, Viviana was still working on adjusting to life alone in her house, after her recent divorce. She stated, “I still sleep with the TV on at home. I have it on the sleep mode where it turns off by itself, but I need noise and I have my little dog, but she doesn’t talk much.” She laughed at her own remark about her pet.
As I mentioned before, there were many moments during the interviews with these participants where laughter slipped in. Perhaps for them laughter served to ease the tension when things got rough. In any case, imagination seemed to have bridged the distance between whatever was going on in their lives at any given time and the attainment of major goals. This suggests that in order to as Carolina stated, “Come up smelling like a rose,” the ability to imagine alternate and happier outcomes and to see past experiences in a positive light was a prominent weapon in my participants’ arsenal against adversity.

**Spirituality**

Morality completes the list of resiliencies presented by Wolin and Wolin (1993). According to these researchers, morality refers to principles that resilient people develop through making judgments about what is right and wrong, adhering to guiding values and the willingness to engage in service to others. The theme of spirituality presented here encompasses some aspects of Wolin and Wolin’s seventh resiliency, but they seem to come almost as a byproduct of each participant’s faith.

The spiritual realm as defined by Richardson (2002) in his description of the third wave in resilience research corresponds to the efforts in the field to provide a more holistic picture of the individuals experiencing the phenomenon. Spirituality according to the extant literature refers to a forceful energy that resides within us and drives us to pursue elevated goals such as achieving a sense of oneness with our higher power. Altruistic pursuits seem to be a component of this human dimension. Brendtro and Larson (2004) related the construct of altruism in their model to values, morality and
faith. The data derived from the participants’ stories revealed spirituality as a predominant theme related to their meaning of resilience and thus as others (Brendtro & Larson, 2004; Kallampally, Oakes, Lyons, Greer, & Gillespie, 2008) did before, I have chosen to acknowledge the place of this human dimension in the findings for this study.

This section is not about religion. In fact, most of the participants self-reported as not being religious people. Although the Christian undertones can be easily detected in the participants’ references to the Bible, Jesus, and even a saint or two, most of the people in this sample seemed to have an ecumenical view of religion. For example, Ricardo claimed that he was not a “practicing Catholic.” He said that he believed in the existence of a higher being. He seemed to be quite open-minded and accepting of other religious philosophies. He said, “If there’s somebody talking religion, I don’t mind listening, because regardless of their point of view, I know that somebody’s guiding them and it’s up to me to make that final decision.” He believed that each philosophy has valid insights. “So I will go to Catholic, I will go to Jehovah’s Witnesses . . . Actually I went to an Islamic church one time. I don’t mind listening to Buddhism. I don’t mind listening to Hinduism, and I don’t mind studying it.” He believed that the only way one can understand views different from our own is by being willing to listen and learn. In his opinion, “Don’t base judgments based on what people say. Make judgments on what you know.”

Ricardo’s willingness to listen to the faith-based points of views of others seems to flow out of his interest in understanding humanity and diversity. Deep inside, he still subscribed to Christian values such as the role of Christ as savior. He believed that “it doesn’t hurt to look at the path that Christ went through,” but he did not believe that faith
ought to be a bone of contention between human beings or provide a justification for hurting others.

Claudia self-reported as a spiritual person. She showed me two shelves that she had especially designated as a meditation/prayer area of her bookshelf. Claudia’s prayer room was the place where her icons from different eastern and western religions merged. Our Lady of Miracles majestically topped one of the shelves. This statue once belonged to Claudia’s grandmother, who raised her. Next to it a vase with pink roses stood in reverence for the statue, one of the many representations of the mother of Christ in the Catholic faith. Towards the bottom of this shelf, archangels, angels, and many other saints stood. They seemed to keep vigil from their designated spots. A small Puerto Rican flag tucked among the statues of Archangels and angels, sat among them as a symbol of the protection that Claudia prayed would keep Puerto Rico safe from harm. This shelf read like a who’s who of the Catholic Church and Christian lore. Just a few feet from it, a matching shelf held a picture of Harold Klemp, a spiritual leader in the ECKANKAR faith. Next to Klemp’s picture, a photo of Claudia and on her right hand side, a drawing of Claudia’s spiritual guide completed the trio. In front of them, several other statuettes and quartz stones completed the vignette. Below, two statues of Buddha, a prayer bowl and a Hindu goddess among other things completed the collection. At first sight it may seem that Claudia has yet to find the answer to her spiritual questions, yet she would beg to differ. Here is what she said about the photos she took of her meditation space.

Este es un pequeño altar de veneración porque cuando yo me siento un poquito triste pues yo voy allí y medito. Y aquí hay una combinación de creencias. Para mí la religión es de acuerdo a cuales sean mis necesidades. [This is a small
veneration altar because when I feel a little sad I go there and I meditate. And here there is a combination of beliefs. To me, religion is relative to my needs.]

Elisa said that, as far as religion was concerned, it was all the same to her. This is how she put it. “Creo en Dios. Creo en que uno tiene que orar, tiene que leer biblia pero no creo que la gente tiene que estar obligada a ir a ninguna religión. Católicos, metodistas, bautistas, todo para mí es la misma cosa. [I believe in God. I believe in that one has to pray, has to read the Bible, but I do not believe that people have to be obligated to go to any one religion. Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, all of that to me is the same thing.]”

**Faith.** References to spirituality or faith-based activities were common among the participants’ stories. When the people in this sample encountered major disappointments, sadness or hurdles, they turned to faith to help them cling to the hope that they would make it through. Hear Claudia speak of the faith that she believed has helped her rise above adversity. Claudia believed that her inner strength “viene de esa espiritualidad, de esa fe tremenda que tengo. [comes from that spirituality, that tremendous faith that I have.] She told me that her faith led her to believe that she could find the solution to any problem and that the outcome would always be the best. She said, “Que yo puedo echar para adelante. Yo puedo superar. [That I can move forward. I can overcome.]” Claudia said there had been times when she felt lonely and did not have anyone to go to for emotional support, “yo tenía la fe en Dios de que todo me iba a salir bien. [I had faith in God that everything was going to turn out good for me.]”
Elisa, while in the hospital and battling death, prayed that God would do His will. Viviana mentioned spirituality as an integral part of her resilience. She said, “I definitely have a relationship with God and have faith.” She felt that God had been there for her every time she encountered a dead end. Viviana said, “I think God has presented a lot of things to me sometimes when I don’t have any other outlet, so I think that’s always been my foundation, and I always go back to that. To me that’s really important.”

When Viviana got divorced she considered returning to her hometown, but “through self-reflection and praying about it,” she decided that the best course of action was to stay where she was. She reportedly thought that moving back home was something “That’s not going to happen any time soon.” She said she loved the life she lead in the town where she lived at the time of this study. She said that her “strong faith in God and knowing that I had help,” has always helped her bounce back from adversity.

One of the things to which Carolina attributed her resilience was, “Faith because He, as it's been said, will not give us what we can't handle.” The belief that God will not give us anything that we cannot handle carries with it the assumption that we can overcome any adverse circumstance we face. She completed her statement with this humorous remark. “But boy is He tough at times!” Francis said about the role of faith in his resilience that, “Faith in a greater power beyond anything or anyone has always been a source of refuge for me: An assurance that this greater power would provide an option, a solution for the issue at hand.” Francis seemed to possess a wide repertoire of adages, quotes, stories, and poems that he used as he found appropriate to a given situation. Many entertaining, hopeful, and encouraging statements found their way into our interviews.
They seemed to reflect an inexorable faith. Francis quoted the scriptures when he said, “Greater is He that is within me than he that is in the world.”

Dalia reflected on characteristics that she believed were important to her resilience. The first two she mentioned were “faithful” and “God-fearing.” Julia survived the horror of abuse more than once. As a child she suffered abuse at the hands of her father, and as a woman, her husband doled out the abuse. She relayed how during those times when hope seemed to be at a far reach, she held on tight to her faith. Let us hear Julia convey how faith played an important role during one of the most terrifying times in her life.

When I got married the first time, my husband was an abuser. So I was physically abused and mentally. The only thing that held me was God. That’s when I would go into my room. I would look at the Bible, read the Bible, cry. You know, pray on my knees and ask God to give me the strength to make a decision because I couldn’t continue. So God has played a very important part in my life.

Call it serendipity, coincidence, or a miracle of sorts, Julia’s husband perished in an accident before she could carry out a plan to deliver herself from her husband’s abusive grip by leaving. Julia concluded that, “When you turn to God, I believe God answers, and He helps in many mysterious ways. God took care of my problem.”

Marlena, too, said that she believed in God and that as far as she could recall, she had always turned to prayer for help. She said, “I always ask God to give me what I need. God puts you in a certain situation and when you have a lot of faith and you believe in Him, He’ll help you make the right decisions.” Marlena turned to her faith and she prayed. She stated that when she is sad, she prayed more and asked for God’s guidance.
Marlena believed that all human beings at one time or another, struggled with negative thinking and sadness. She said that when she experienced feelings and thoughts of that sort, she turned to God and asked Him to “take that away, to take that sadness, to guide me [in] the right direction,. But there’s other people who probably need more than what I would need. I have to be thankful.”

Marlena’s position here is reminiscent of Ricardo’s earlier statement that if we look behind us, we may find another who is in worse shape or in greater need than we are. There seemed to be a moral issue here for Marlena that perhaps helped her access an alternate perspective. Even when she experienced sadness, in the grand scheme of things, Marlena was able to identify something that she could be thankful for.

The data suggest that for the people in this group faith provided a respite from stress that may have allowed them to experience a new sense of hope and continue tackling the difficult tasks they encountered in life. When they were tossed and turned by the tide, faith seems to have been for these participants a steadying element that allowed them to regain their balance. They did not need adversity to magically dissipate. Just a rest, albeit brief, courtesy of their spiritual beliefs seemed like just right thing to nudge them to keep moving forward and to never give up.

Emma was having a rough school year when the interviews for this study took place. She was under much stress at work and battling some health issues. Perhaps synchronicity could provide an alternate explanation to all of the sudden Emma running into several former students. They reminded her of happier times and of the advice she had offered them, and that they still cherished. Emma stated her conviction that God had found a way to let her know that He was still with her and that she would be all right, “in
a way, that I noticed, and I was crying all the way from school to my house because it dawned on me on the freeway” that maybe God was letting her know that she did make a difference in the lives of her students. She said, “So now that has helped me a lot. Now I pay attention to every little thing and I try to write it down, like that thing about the keys.”

Of course I had to ask “The keys?” and the answer Emma gave me is perfectly fitting here. On the morning of the Friday preceding Emma’s second interview, she had overslept and was feeling very tired. On her way out the door, she noticed that her keys were missing. She knew that she had neither the energy nor the time to search all over her house for the missing keys. She uttered a short prayer that God would lead her to where her keys were. She said, “I go to the living room and the first place I lay my hands on, there are the keys. So hey, you know what? I’ve got to be on the lookout you know, because I’m not alone.”

Aside from any religious dogma that may dictate or define what having an intimate relationship with God means, these individuals seemed to have figured out how to connect with their higher being to derive strength and hope. They spoke of their connection with God as if speaking of a very close friend or a most loving parent. The participants in this study made reference to faith and spirituality and the gratitude they felt towards their higher being. By now the reader, regardless of his or her spiritual beliefs or religious biases gets the picture. The participants’ stories suggest that spirituality acted as a factor promotive of their resilience.
**Service.** The participants in this study were proud of who they were and what they had accomplished. They seemed to have a moral compass that guided them towards improving conditions, not only for themselves but for others. For example, Viviana’s rationale for pursuing an added specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy was to understand her personal experiences with domestic relationship issues, but also to “really help other people who don’t have a voice.” She thought about the population she worked with and about how many of them did not have access to family therapy services. She said, “So I do like Family Therapy in my office.” Viviana told me that she tried to provide immediate assistance to her students and their families because “I’m their first call for help, I’m going to make sure that I’m going to be what they need at that time, even if I have to refer them out later on.”

Viviana seized the opportunity to obtain new insights on her experiences and at the same time to acquire tools that would allow her to provide additional services to the families of the students at her school. The clichéd phrases that come to mind are spreading the wealth, or paying it forward. Viviana had always wanted better for herself and for her family. The realization of that early dream let her reach out and help others whom she encountered in her daily living.

Claudia stated that engaging in the philosophy of ECKANCAR helped her understand her purpose in serving others and it resulted in her taking care of a number of people who otherwise would not have had the resources to get the help they needed. Two of them, an elderly couple. She said, “*Tuve una visión y esa visión me ayudó a entender cuál era mi propósito.* [I had a vision and that vision helped me understand my purpose.]”
Emma took care of her mother as discussed before, but she, as well as other participants, did not stop with her immediate family. There were many ways in which service manifested in the stories of the individuals who participated in this study. While in the hospital taking care of her mom, Emma helped a hospital worker with translations for her college assignments. She said, “One of the nurses asked me if I could translate two or three sheets, copies from a book that she had a report to make. So I said ‘Sure.’”

Picture this, your mother is dying, you are tired, but even though, “I had a bed next to me that I could sleep in or rest in, but I didn’t dare fall asleep.” You are keeping vigil and already grieving the fact that you know her impending death is inevitable. You are dealing with mortality here and someone asks for your help with a college assignment. What would you do? Some might have been offended by the request. Emma helped. A couple of days later, her mother “translated” into another life as Emma chose to see it. Additionally, Emma helped extensively in church, offering her clerical skills and teaching Sunday school. Similar to other participants, she engaged in fundraising for helping impoverished schools.

You may recall that one of Julia’s early fundraisers led her to seriously consider becoming a special needs teacher. A clear picture of the participants’ engagement in service surfaced in their stories about school and their students. The participants in this study seemed to have a deep desire to be of service to others. Dalia may have offered the clearest description of this desire.

I see a person in need Maria, and I don’t know what it is. It’s just like it’s a natural, me sale [it emerges from me]. Me sale naturalmente sin, ¿cómo se dice? [It emerges naturally from me without, how do you say it?] Sin [Without] strings
Como el cantar del coquí

attached. *Tú no me tienes que dar a mí nada. Yo lo hago porque me sale de aquí* [You do not have to give me anything. I do it because it comes from here. (Lays palm on her chest.)].

For fear of being redundant, I will include some of those teacher stories here rather than in the section about teaching. These stories transcend teaching because the things that the reader will find that the participants had done were not required as part of their contractual duties. Teaching is a service in and of itself, but the following stories found their place outside the classroom.

Dalia said that she had many stories about service to others. She believed that service did not come without risks. She shared that any time it was up to her to avoid a student becoming another statistic; she was ready to extend her help to those in need of her services. She informed parents and advocated for the rights of students. Sometimes she found herself risking a bit too much, but never felt regret for going beyond what her contractual duties called for. She said, “Sometimes I am scared but you know what? Do I have any regrets? No.” She said that each time before she acted, she said a prayer and then moved forward with the certainty that God knew her heart and the intentions leading to her actions.

That an attempt to help someone may be misconstrued as breaking the rules seemed present in Dalia’s mind. The risks were sometimes great, but her desire to make a difference in the life of a child or family who did not have the resources to do it alone, and her faith in God seem to be enough to find her pressing on in her service to others. Others in the sample expressed similar sentiments. Emma worked in an area where violence and drugs were the order of the day. She became well known in the nearby
public housing development by showing up looking for her students when they were absent from her class. One can hear the empathy in Emma’s words.

So it got to the point that they just saw me in the corner and they’d be yelling and screaming “Get yourself down here and hurry up, get to class. There’s the teacher again.” So you also understand that there are a lot of kind people that don’t necessarily ask to be living in that place. They’re decent human beings too, but you know you’ve got people from all walks of life that are in places that they wish they weren’t, and so they just might try to mind their business until they can get to be elsewhere. Like the kids down here that are living in places where bullets fly from left to right and they can’t even be on their porch. That’s horrible.

This concern for the less fortunate seemed to drive many of the participants to go the extra mile on their behalf. Carmen for example, gave herself to the task of providing transportation for three children whose parents could not afford public transportation and for a fourth one whose parents would have had to send him to a school that was closer to home, but did not offer the safety and services available to the child at Carmen’s school. Carmen said, “I cry when I see this and the conditions.” Whenever there was a need that Carmen could help alleviate, she did not seem to hesitate in offering her services to students and their parents.

I picked them up every day for a year because if I didn’t pick them up, they wouldn’t come to school. I said, “Oh yes, you’re coming to school.” And the mom, two of them were brother and sister, the other one she was such a nice [girl], so much potential and you know, I picked them up and there I was at 7:15 eh-eh [pretending to honk horn] from here than I went picked her up. This past
year, not this year, the year before, Rubén, my baby. *Bendito.* [poor thing] *Ese era* [that one was a] newcomer. *Ese es mi hijo.* [That is my son.] “Ay Misi, [Oh Miss] they’re going to put me in another school because we moved.” “You’re going to what? Oh. no, no, you’re not leaving Robert Waters no, no, no, no.” “But Miss, I don’t have any,” “Tell your mom that if it’s okay I [will] pick you up and take you back to school.” I picked him up and took him back to school for one year. But that baby, he was not going to a school that was self contained for 8th grade, which is a complete disservice for the kids.

Note that Carmen referred to Rubén as her son even though the child was not related to her. Julia took students home just as her teacher did for her many years ago when the violence at home was too overwhelming for her. She invested both money and time to bring a bit of joy and hope to students in dire financial straits. Julia had a student who had “overcome many problems at home.” Despite all the obstacles the young woman had faced, she made it to senior year and completed the requirements for graduation. One day she stood outside of Julia’s classroom and asked to speak with her privately. Julia told me that she always offered students this option.

The young woman was distraught over the fact that she would not be able to attend prom. Her mother was ill. The student worked, but her paycheck went to helping pay the household bills. She told Julia, “We’re about to lose the house.” Julia looked at her and told her “You are going to prom.” She would accept no arguments although the young woman tried to explain that there was no way that she could participate because she did not have the money. Julia insisted, “Listen to me! You are going to prom!”
Julia took on the responsibility that would normally correspond to a parent on behalf of the student. She paid for her prom ticket, bought her all the things needed to make her prom night a magical one. Julia even paid for the student to have her nails and hair done. On prom night, Julia picked the young girl up and drove her to the party. Julia said, “She was so grateful.” The young woman’s mother cried when she thanked Julia. She called her “an angel.” Julia’s response was, “No, I would’ve done this for anyone.”

These individuals spoke of being grateful for what they had. Perhaps that gratitude compelled them to share their blessings with others. Marlena for example, mentioned that sometimes her daughters outgrew items of clothing or other things and she would donate them to children in her school who might be in need of the items. She said, “If I see them without a coat, I try to get them a coat, sometimes shoes.”

To someone who has the financial resources to go out and buy whatever he or she needs, this may seem insignificant, but to children with limited economic resources, a warm coat and a pair of shoes, even if gently used, may make a world of a difference. The following words summarize Marlena’s feelings about service and helping others: “I learned that what you have you share. What you could [do to] help others, you do it unconditionally. I don’t care who you are, what you are.”

These educators shared experiences with students that are impossible to fit within the school day. Although they had poignant stories to share about events that happened within the school day, these stories and others stand out even more because the events occurred within the realm of the educators’ private time and space. A final example from Dalia may suffice. One summer she helped a student from a war torn country. The young
lady in Dalia’s story did not seem to understand the rules of hygiene prevalent in mainstream society. Dalia knew that the young lady needed an intervention if she was to have a chance at succeeding in a U.S. high school environment. To this young woman, feminine pads, deodorant, perfume, shielding her breasts from view and coifing her hair constituted things unknown.

June came, and with it a much needed rest for teachers and central office administrators. Although the latter group still had to report to work, most of their duties would entail paperwork, assessment of students new to the district, meetings with central office bosses, and such. One day, Dalia’s boss walked in to find her protégé in the office. Disgusted by the body odor that permeated the space, the origin of which everyone knew, he inquired, “¿Por qué esa muchacha está aquí? [Why is that girl here?]” Dalia pleaded with him to let the girl stay in the office, as she wanted to teach her basic social graces that had escaped her while she was immersed in a different culture and busy surviving the horrors of war. Because he trusted her judgment, Dalia’s boss agreed. For two years in a row, the young woman came to the office with Dalia. Here is Dalia’s version of what transpired later.

_Yo le traje hasta ropa de casa, porque era bien chiquitita. Le traje un vestidito._

_Estaba bien linda. Era un vestido que tenía como un sash. Se puso el sash al revés, pero no importa. La cosa es que poquito a poco ella vino_ [I even brought her clothes from home because she was very small. I brought her a little dress. She looked so pretty. This was a dress that had a sash. She put the sash on backwards, but that doesn’t matter. The thing is that little by little she came] and she started to get used to looking nice. _Yo le traje un_, [I brought her a] like a little
Como el cantar del coquí

A care package de [from] Bath and Body. A ella le encantó. Yo le dije, “Cuando tú te bañas, después de que tú te bañas tú siempre te pones tu desodorante, y te pones tu spray. Si no tienes perfume te puedes poner este body spray.” y yo le dije, “Te gusta?” [She loved it. I told her, “When you bathe you always put on your deodorant and you put on your spray. If you don’t have perfume, you can put on this body spray.”] “I like, I like.” y le encantó [and she loved it].

During the time spent with Dalia, the young refugee learned to answer the telephone, learned to dress according to the standards of her new social environment, and in Dalia’s words, learned “to like herself in her new acculturation process.” Dalia expressed gratitude for her boss’s trust, which opened the door for her to help the young woman. She admitted that she knew that it must have been rough for the rest of the office personnel because of the extreme body odor and unkempt appearance of the young lady. Their encouragement paid off, as a few years hence, the student was able to successfully meet the state requirements for a high school diploma.

Serving others seemed common among the individuals in this sample. It seems their faith in something or someone bigger than they motivated them to share their wealth, however measured or defined, with others. The monetary rewards were null but plentiful on a different level. After all, they did choose education as a career and as Francis said, “When you go into education, believe me; you don’t do it to drive a Rolls Royce. You do it for the satisfaction of putting your passionate monster to rest, and that is because it’s like a hunger.” These poignant words serve as the perfect segue into the next chapter of this study. There the reader will find the insights of the participants regarding the topic of education and helping students develop resilience.
CHAPTER VI

Roads to Teaching

Not everyone comes into the field of education via the same path. Although the participants in this study arrived at their present careers in different ways, they seemed to have a core of beliefs in common. Table 5 depicts the teacher-related themes and sub-themes that provide the basis for the contents of this chapter. Before we enter into a discussion regarding those beliefs, specifically those related to helping students overcome adversity, I invite the reader to travel with me for a brief moment through the paths which led the people in this group to choose education as a career.

Table 5

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Teaching: A Vocation

Three of the participants in this study felt a pull towards education from the time they were very young. Julia’s teacher and protector inspired her from very early on in her
life. She stated, “My teacher. She was the one that said you know, come over to my house, [and] don’t worry. We’ll take care of it, just stay away. And she was my inspiration, actually, for becoming a professional.” Later, an experience during a fundraiser for children with disabilities inspired Julia to seek, to work with special needs children. She said, “So that was like an eye-opener, right there. That’s why I’m a special needs teacher today.”

When I asked Armando about how he arrived at teaching as his career of choice, he exclaimed, “Oh! I’ve been wanting to be a teacher since I was a child.” He was in the fifth grade when he first said that he wanted to be a teacher. He said, “I don’t know. It just grew in me. I think that I just like the fact that, that [is] helping others. I’ve always liked to deal with children.” When Armando was 14 years old, he decided, “to discover what teaching was like.” While in high school, he volunteered at a local elementary school. He loved the experience, and the teachers and other school personnel liked him so much that they recommended him for an open position as a family and community outreach person fresh out of high school. He got the job, and became well known in his school district. He said, “I knew so many people in the district, and I loved it. I loved it.”

A few years later, Armando received a scholarship through that same school district to pursue a teaching degree. He successfully completed his bachelor’s degree, and began teaching there. While completing his master’s degree in education, he was offered a managerial position with the schools. He took the offer but soon chose to return to the classroom. He said, “I don’t see myself working in anything else. I worked in administration, and I missed it [teaching] so much that I came back.”
Armando’s classroom told about his passion. Seats arranged in an open rectangle allowed him easy access to any child who needed individual help. The space was clean and organized, with walls replete with print in English and Spanish and student work displayed throughout. Students seemed to know exactly what to do when they entered the classroom. Armando introduced me and the children said hello, and then they immediately started their lesson. The energy in the room felt encouraging and motivating. I sensed a palpable air of positivity while I observed this class. Students helped and supported each other. Armando later told me that he set the expectation for collaboration among peers. Positive rapport between the teacher and his students seemed evident to me. As someone who has been in the field for almost thirty years, I could tell that what I observed that afternoon was not staged. Although Armando encouraged self reliance by gently nudging students towards the direction in which they needed to go to find the answers they sought, I did not sense frustration from any of them. These children seemed to be on a mission. Focused and determined to complete their tasks, they for the most part, ignored the stranger sitting in the back of the room.

Like Armando, Viviana stated that she knew from early on that she wanted a career in education:

You know I always knew, like my mom did the counseling thing for a little bit, like a Guidance Counselor. So that was her title, but I saw how close kids got to her, you know, and I always knew that I wanted to be a counselor, and I was like “Okay, so let me become a teacher,” and I knew that at the time the law was like you had to teach for three years, and then you could go for your Masters in Counseling. So I was like “Oh, now that’s exactly what I’m going to do.”
Viviana went into teaching deliberately. She had a plan. As a counselor she still taught, but most of her time was dedicated to helping students with issues that transcended the academic content areas. Understanding herself and her experiences came as a byproduct of her studies in counseling. She said that she was doing exactly what she wanted to do and she loved it.

**Teaching: A Calling.**

Most of the participants in the study chose education as a career after they became adults. For example, for some it was a way of obtaining a degree that would afford them the opportunity to begin working and earning a salary soon after graduation. Other reasons existed and on some occasions the lines seemed to blur in that the need existed but they also needed the gentle nudge of a mentor. The bottom line is that for nine of the participants in this study, education had not, at least on a conscious level, been their first career choice; however, sooner or later they heard the call and responded affirmatively. Following are their journeys into the field of education.

Ricardo was a school bus driver who later became a technician who worked with some students. One of the students told Ricardo that he ought to become a teacher. He said, “Mr. Ricardo, you should get into teaching. You seem to care.” Ricardo responded that indeed he did care. He said that if I had asked him right out of high school if he wanted to be a teacher he would have said, “You’re out of your mind! [Teaching] was not my cup of tea at that particular point.” Additionally his supervisor and mentor noticed something special in him. He too suggested that Ricardo go into teaching. Mr. Landau noticed that Ricardo was “not the kind of person that sits back and waits for things to
happen. You like to do it yourself, and perhaps it’s time for you to go back to school,” Ricardo wondered how he could possibly go back to school. After all, he was no longer a teenager out of high school. He thought he was too old to go back to school. He was 25 years old. He figured it would take him at least ten years to finish school. Mr. Landau said to him, “Better to be 35 with a degree than 35 without a degree. I can help you out and get [you] started. All you have to do, you just take one class at a time.”

Ricardo found himself unable to argue with Mr. Landau’s logic. He heeded his mentor’s advice and “lucky enough” as soon as he obtained his degree; Mr. Landau offered him a new position. Ricardo said, “So that’s how I ended up with teaching.” Ricardo believed that “Sometimes we don’t choose what we want to do. Sometimes destiny has a chosen path for us. You can either go against it or you can go with it, and I went with it.” He thought about his experience and concluded that “Sometimes what we want and what we end up doing [are] two different stories.” He believed that sometimes there is a path that we are meant to follow and that once we understand what it is, “rather than trying to fight it, make the best out of it. Work with the current, not against it. The path is a lot easier when you work with it.”

An interesting observation regarding Ricardo’s words is that they seem deterministic; however, when he mentioned destiny in any of his interviews, it always referred to something positive, not harmful or negative. Ricardo espoused a strong belief in the individual’s power to choose to improve his or her circumstances. You may recall that he refused to “go with the flow” when he started the minimum wage job working with a group of Latinos. He swam against the current even though he was ill equipped in terms of English language proficiency and enlisted in a branch of the military where he
spent five very successful years. Claudia also had such an interest in going into the armed services that she never considered becoming a teacher. She said, “A mí me gustaba todo menos el ser maestra por la sencilla razón que a mí siempre me gustaba la milicia. [I liked anything other than teaching simply because I always liked the military.]”

Claudia went into teaching as a result of a career assessment. She said, “Cuando llenamos la solicitud de la universidad, hicimos un cuestionario en la universidad y salí que yo cualificaba para ser maestra y decidí aplicar para maestra. Entonces cogí el asociado primeramente. Como no estaba segura cogí el asociado. [When we filled out our college application, we filled out a questionnaire, and I came out as qualified for teaching, and I decided to apply for teaching. Then I got my associate degree first. Because I was not sure, I took an associate’s degree.]” She had completed a secretarial course in high school. Out of her group of friends with the secretarial diploma, Claudia was the only one who changed the course of her career path. It would be hard to guess that teaching was a second choice for Claudia just by seeing her interact with students, taking a look at her classroom, and hearing her speak of her students. She had a reputation in her school district for caring about children and their families, while holding them to high expectations. Her high school classroom was warm and inviting, and she seemed to have an excellent rapport with her students.

Much like Claudia, Elisa expressed not having had an interest in teaching as a career. She asserted, “Cuando yo me gradué de cuarto año, lo menos que quería ser, y yo creo que me lo dije a mí misma, ‘Nunca voy a ser maestra.’ [When I graduated from high school, the last thing I wanted to become, and I think I said it to myself, ‘I’m never going to be a teacher.’]” Elisa had experienced a group of mean students who made one of her
teachers cry, and then proceeded to make fun of her for doing so. Teaching seemed as enticing to young Elisa as a boat ride across the river Styx. After graduation, she entered college with the goal of majoring in biology.

As life would have it, Elisa made some choices that resulted in a change of plans. She concluded that her major would not lead to a paying career anytime soon. She had gotten married and had a baby. She needed to complete her college education as soon as possible. Elisa figured that going into teaching would allow her to apply her scientific skills and obtain a degree with earning potential. She confessed that it was not until she did her student-teaching that she liked her newly chosen career. She said, “Y ahí fué que yo dije, “Me gusta biología, me gusta enseñar y me voy a quedar enseñando. [That’s when I said, I like biology, I like teaching and I am going to stay in teaching.]” She reported loving her job and spending time with her students.

The birth of Carmen’s first child marked the moment when she decided that teaching was what she wanted to do. Her grandfather and a grand-aunt had been teachers, “but teaching is devaluated in society. When you want to be something you never want to be a teacher. You get to teaching in other ways.” She had forgotten how much she enjoyed pretending to be a teacher as a young child. She recalled that, “When I was little and I studied for school I was the teacher, and I’d have all my dolls on the bed, and the door was the board. Therefore I wanted to be a teacher, I just didn’t know.”

Carmen had wanted to be a veterinarian. This made sense to me, as her love for animals was still evident. Her dogs and a cat became a captive audience to our face to face interviews and an array of exotic birds provided at times a cacophonous soundtrack
to the recordings of the data. Albeit still enamored with caring for animals, Carmen loved her career and the students she worked with. She said, “I became a teacher and I love it.”

Teaching had not been Dalia’s first choice either. She wanted to help people and thus pursued nursing, a passion she had developed while helping care for her diabetic grandmother. As the reader may recall, a phobia of needles cut Dalia’s initial career dream short. She pursued social work. After three years of experiencing work as a social worker and the frustrations of not being able to provide more help for abused children and families in need she decided to explore other options. She said, “So I did that and it took a toll on me emotionally. I wanted to bring every kid home. I wanted to rescue every single person, especially babies that were being neglected or abused.” Dalia asked herself, “Is this really truly what you want to do? It’s really eating you up.” She reflected on her discontent with the job that she was doing and she knew that there had to be a place in the world of work where she could achieve a sense of empowerment in her desire to help others. That was when she decided to pursue teaching. Teaching had been one of the areas reflected on her results from a career inventory her college counselor gave her.

Dalia worked for another three years with the county as a case aide, helping place children in foster care and helping families with federal aid. One day she had an epiphany. She said to herself, “I’m working with these families. I’m trying to coach them and educate them. I think I want to be a teacher.” So she went back to her college counselor and he told her that she only needed to take five more courses to complete a teaching degree. She said, “He connected me with [the local State University] and I became a teacher.” When Dalia began working in the school district that she worked for at the time of this study, “I saw many things that resonated within me about my life. I saw
many Dalias running around. I said ‘This is where I need to be. This is where my calling is,’ and this is where I am today.”

Dalia never looked back. She taught for a while and was eventually offered a managerial position which allowed her to continue to work directly with students and their families while giving them a voice at the administrative level.

Marlena graduated high school with no definite plans for a career. She had considered becoming a flight attendant, but later decided against it. Unsure of what she wanted to be, she entered college and started working on the basic courses. She got married, dropped out of college and after her first daughter’s birth, her decision to become a teacher crystallized. One of her high school teachers had once told her that she would make a good English teacher. She remembered his statement and decided to major in English and to teach English.

Francis found his passion for teaching as a result of joining an afterschool Future Teachers club in middle school. His first lesson, that was seven minutes long, marked the onset of his journey to becoming an educator. He shared with me a newspaper article where he was featured for his excellent work with students. He reflected on his supervisor’s reaction to the article and that she said that she had done the “job” for so many years and had never been recognized. He found her choice of words interesting as for him this was not just a job. It was a calling. The following excerpt illustrates Francis’s thoughts about people who have “settled” for education.

How many people after Vietnam, during Vietnam, went into education and then found themselves stuck, and they did not become the lawyer that they wanted to become because they met Ms. Florence on the third floor teaching biology that
year, and they fell in love, and now they’ve got a bunch of kids, and they owe all over the world, and so now they’re stuck putting up with these kids day in and day out, and there was no calling for them. There wasn’t a calling. It was just a settling. They settled into these positions. “I’m just tolerating you until my 35th year of service or my 30th year of service so that I can finally pursue the passions that I was really meant to have, and I can stop paying the alimony or stop paying the child support.” Langston Hughes. What happens to a dream deferred? What happens to it? And so many people go into education because of the days off. “Oh you don’t do anything during the summer, and you’re off at 2:30.” Yeah, there are those who walk out of here at 2:30. Come in, “I put my day in,” as I was told recently by someone when I asked if they would be part of the Awards Committee or whatever. And I said to myself “Really? Such a claim to fame.”

Of the twelve participants in this study, only three set out to be educators from early on in their lives. The rest discovered their passion for teaching or heard the calling later on. Notwithstanding, for those for whom teaching was a second or even a third choice, it represented a discovery and not a settling for a lesser career. Emma, for example, was happy being a secretary. She thoroughly enjoyed the work she did and experienced much success in it. Earlier, I stated that Emma’s trip to Jerusalem had resulted in a life altering and career changing experience. Here is Emma’s road to teaching story: a calling near Gethsemane.

“The Continental Hotel was up on a slope. You could see what they call the Garden of Gethsemane, a lot of places, religious areas, and the domes that the sun hits and that gold [that] really shines and glitters.” Emma was waiting for her transport from
the hotel to the airport to arrive when suddenly she heard children’s voices singing. All she could see was grass covering the mountain slope. Her curiosity compelled her to follow the path delineated by a winding sidewalk that seemed to disappear just at the bend. Emma said, “And when I go around some way down the sidewalk of that slope, there’s an opening.” Inside the cave, children sat around a distressed wooden “aqua-green table.” Emma said, “Inside everything is dirt. The walls are dirt. The floors are dirt…” The children sang in a language that Emma could not understand. They repeated what the woman dressed in what seemed like the attire of ages past was saying. Emma wondered whether her vision of a teacher with her students in this cave on the side of that mountain was real, or whether she had stepped into a scene from long ago by way of her imagination. “And I said, ‘My God, in the middle of this modern place and you see this.’”

Only a few days after observing the group of children in Jerusalem, she accompanied the pastor of her church to school to pick up his children. While she waited in the car for the dismissal bell to ring, she uttered, “I would like to be in one of those classrooms some day.” Her pastor did not say a word, but he heard her wishful remark loud and clear. To Emma’s surprise the next day the pastor called her. He had gotten her all the materials needed for her to take her college entrance exam, and to apply to college. He said “And now I’m bringing you what you need, and I’m sure that you’re going to be a great teacher.”

Emma found her calling in a cave of a distant land. The seed seemingly planted in her psyche such a long way away from home budded under the hot sun of Puerto Rico. The tender loving care of a mentor who listened to Emma’s wishful thinking would act as the catalyst for Emma’s pursuit of her newborn dream. She later said that she had felt that
she had to complete the college application process because he believed in her. Apparently, this man had done the same for several youth in his church with all of them completing degrees in different fields. This is a great example of the power that mentors and encouragers can have in the life of another human being. You see, Emma’s parents had wanted her to get an education, but perhaps because their educational experiences had been limited, Emma and her sister finishing high school seemed to suffice. Emma’s pastor opened a door to a wider horizon when he brought her the application materials and set up an appointment for her at a nearby college and as they say, the rest is history.

They walked into the field of education via a variety of doorways. Some of them were now inching towards the completion of their careers; others were midway through their journeys and a few had quite a way to go before hanging their proverbial hats. The commonalities found in their beliefs about teaching seem interesting because the data did not reveal a discrepancy of opinions among the sample despite the range in chronological age and teaching experiences represented in the group. The following themes encompass the beliefs that they shared about how teachers can help students develop resilience.

**Sharing the Stories**

Every single one of the participants expressed a belief in sharing stories of resilience with students. They said that if teachers are to be role models for students, they need to be willing to share their stories of adversities overcome. Viviana cautioned that in doing this, educators must exercise good judgment. In Viviana’s opinion there are things that an educator should abstain from sharing. She gave the example of a student who tells the counselor, “My teacher told me that she had an abortion last week.” Viviana stated
that it would be inappropriate for an educator to share that type of information with students.

Viviana said, “I share with them, ‘Look, I didn’t have a charmed life growing up, and I was abused’ and I don’t think I go to [greater] an extent because I don’t think they need to know all that.” For example, the eyes of a student who was a Second Language Learner lit up when Viviana shared with her that she had been an SLL too. The ensuing question was “Am I not going to have an accent one day?” Viviana assured her that while she could not guarantee that she would not have an accent someday, she would be able to do many great things. She said, “I just really believe in support and examples and leading by examples and keeping their self-esteem high.”

Viviana believed that sharing stories of resilience helped students acquire new perspectives. She said, “I share not only mine, just the surface, but I share other students’ on the surface too,” Being careful not to violate her clients’ right to confidentiality, Viviana let her students know that they were not alone because there were others who have lived similar experiences, or worse. She said, “and they’re like ‘Wow, people do have it worse than I do.’ So I think it’s important sharing because I think they need to relate.”

Claudia shared her experiences with her students. Recently a former student came to see her seeking advice for her marital woes. Claudia did not hesitate to tell her of her own experience with a husband who after her divorce refused to help care for their children. She told her, “Tú tienes que seguir trabajando ayudarte a tí misma con tus niños. [You have to keep working to help yourself with your children.] In the classroom, Claudia shared stories with her students as did the others. These educators believed that
sharing stories of resilience with their students offered them an opportunity to relate to them and to offer hope in what sometimes seemed to students as hopeless situations. Their stories included instances about how they felt when they experienced learning a second language and about adversities that they faced during their developmental years. They expressed a belief in their students’ capacities to thrive in the presence of adversity and they claimed to consistently articulate this belief to their students.

Participants said that they usually followed their stories of resilience with a piece of practical advice that students could begin applying right away. Julia gave the following example when I asked her about self disclosure and teachers who may believe that it is not a good idea: “I would say that they’re wrong, completely wrong because most of us have been there. We have struggled. We have gone through so many problems that these kids are encountering today.” She told her students about her own alcoholic father and encouraged them to use writing as therapy. “When you feel that you are struggling, that you feel that you’re down, stressed, depressed, just get a notebook and jot down everything that you’re going through. And have a little journal. Don’t let anybody see it.” She told them about how writing about her feelings helped her get through some of the roughest times in her life. She said, “That’s what I did. That’s what helped me.”

Marlena said that she shared stories with her students about choices, about her experiences growing up, and about her struggles with second language acquisition. The participants’ statements suggest that they believed that if they were able to beat the odds, so could their students. These participants did not believe that they were extraordinary in any way. The inference here is that it does not take extraordinary power or ability to resile, just the unrelenting desire to improve one’s circumstances, some key character
values, aspirations and the willingness to put forth the effort with persistence and
determination.

**Educator’s Role**

*Value diversity.* A set of beliefs about the role of educators in helping students
develop resilience surfaced from the data. Although the participants seemed to believe
that educators can help students develop resilience, they expressed that they can only
impact students’ resilience indirectly. They identified providing support that may
promote the development of an emotional connection with students as paramount to
students’ development of resilience. This, as they stated, cannot be done by enabling
students out of pity. They said that teachers should ask students reflection questions about
the situation at hand, thus allowing them to develop the insight to make right choices and
understand the consequences tied to the options available to them. They believed in
supporting and encouraging students’ articulation of aspirations, dreams, and goals and of
guiding them through the goal setting process. The participants underscored the
importance of educators teaching students that mistakes are learning opportunities rather
representing a permanent setback in life. They believed in conveying hope and in helping
students redefine themselves in light of their strengths and the possibilities that await
them.

The data suggest that the participants collectively believed that in order for
educators to make a difference, they must genuinely care about their students. Caring,
from their perspective means to take the time to listen, to be sensitive to the needs of
students and to bother to show interest in them as a whole person. For example, Claudia spoke of her experience with students from other countries:

> Yo estoy enseñando ahora estudiantes de Nepal, de Africa y China. Yo no conozco sobre sus culturas. Lo primero que yo hice fue presentarme y que ellos se presentaran y me dijeran algo de su país, que [pensaran que] yo quería saber. Rapidito uno trajo el globo y me enseñó donde queda Nepal cerca de las Himalayas, todo eso. Pues ahora yo tengo una base más fuerte y puedo ayudarlos y nos podemos comprender mejor porque ya ellos me han enseñado a mí quienes son ellos y de dónde vienen. Se sienten muy orgullosos. Y los de Africa también y los de China. Para mí si los maestros realmente quieren ayudar a los estudiantes, deben de preguntarles, “de dónde tú eres?” Tú sabes, tener una relación donde ellos no se sientan que están frustrados porque la maestra no los entiende. [I am now teaching students from Nepal, Africa and China. I do not know about their cultures. The first thing I did was to introduce myself and had them introduce themselves and tell me something about their countries that [they thought] I would want to know. Quickly one brought over the globe and showed me where Nepal is located near the Himalayas, all that. Well now I have a stronger foundation and I can help them and we understand each other better because they have now shown me who they are and where they come from. They feel proud. The ones from Africa and China too.]

Though it may sound simplistic, the data suggest that teachers taking the time to inquire about their students’ cultural background, allowing them to share that part of them in the school setting may help the teacher develop positive rapport with the
students. Claudia, as well as others, expressed that students are sometimes left feeling resentful when teachers are insensitive to their culture. Others (Anzaldúa, 2004; Fiol-Matta, 1996; Rodriguez, 1974; Souto-Manning, 2006) would agree with my participants’ opinions on being sensitive to students’ cultural identity. This includes language. Claudia presented herself as an example in that she chose to do her interviews completely in Spanish because it was much more comfortable to articulate her thoughts in her vernacular. She said that sometimes students revert to their vernacular when they are trying to explain themselves or in an emotionally charged situation and that usually teachers get upset because they think that the student is disparaging them even when there is an interpreter present. “¡Habla ingles! [Speak English!]” they are told even when they do not possess the verbal skills to do so. Let us hear a story that Francis told me about a similar experience that a pair of students had at his school.

I’m sitting in there, and I hear this in the best Albanian accent, but I won’t attempt to do it, but it was something like, “Why are you speaking Spanish? This is America. In America we speak English. Remember that. You should be speaking English,” and I later found out that the person, and let me just back up—if you’re the Chairman of a Math Department and you see two kids yelling and screaming over a problem in geometry or you know something dealing with the solution of a mathematical problem, would you tell them not to do that there on their free time? So when I got the kids I said in Spanish to them, “Where are you from?” and they said “Oh that man, was he making fun of us or something?” they said to me in Spanish ‘cause they could tell by his mocking facial expressions. I just looked at them and said “Do you think that a teacher would say that to you? Come on. He
Como el cantar del coquí 318

said something about, I was working over here, but he said something about America. Maybe he was asking you, is today your first day or your first week in America. Was it your first day in America?” They said “Oh yeah. Yeah, we just got in last night.”

The data suggest that at least in the district where they worked, valuing diversity and multiculturalism were espoused but not consistently practiced values. For example, Carolina said that at her school it seemed that students’ cultures were valued only when it was time to put together a multicultural performance.

At times it is, when they want to do a multicultural program. At other times it’s not. As a matter of fact, we just had our graduation, and you have to understand the different cultures as to how everybody reacts for their first child graduating, and so every ethnicity deals with it in a certain way, and yesterday the kids were told, “Parents are not to be loud.”

Carolina believed that the statement about the parents not being loud was insensitive. She mentioned the Latino and Arabic cultures specifically and the low tolerance that she seemed to perceive took place in school regarding these populations. Dalia spoke vehemently about the need for teachers to get to know their students at a more significant level. She said that teachers need to get to know their students on an individual basis. “What they have been through or their background, how do they learn best? Get to know the families.” She believed that, “Our kids bring so many wonderful resources” to the classroom. She thought that it was important that teachers pay attention to elements beyond just academics.
Dalia was referring to all students, specifically SLLs and not just Latinos. The findings here suggest that these participants valued diversity and believed that doing so becomes a helpful tool in connecting with students no matter where they come from and what their native language may be.

Elisa said, “Me llevo bien con mis estudiantes regulares y todos, los hispanos, y los morenos. Nos llevamos super bien. [I get along with my regular students, the Hispanics and the African Americans. We get along super well.]” She told of an African student who looked up to her and whose future marriage her family had arranged. The young lady, according to Elisa, was bright and filled with dreams about pursuing a college career. Elisa took her under her wing and was listening to and encouraging her, while providing gentle advice and information that she believed may help the student reach her goals. Regarding this topic, Marlena provided an interesting analogy for how she saw the diversity in her classroom: “We’re not all the same, and what I mean by that, just look at your hand. One hand but your fingers all are different and that’s the way we need to see it.” She said that the purpose was to learn, and in order to do that there had to be mutual respect despite individual differences. A climate of mutual respect is paramount to building the type of relationship with students that can lead to supporting their development of resilience.

The findings in this study point to the participants’ steadfast belief that if we aim to help students develop resilience, we must stay away from enabling practices that can only serve to cripple their spirit and hinder their self-reliance. This is not to mean that they subscribed to the belief that students need to find their own way through a path
frequently riddled with obstacles. On the contrary, they all seemed to subscribe to the belief that educators can be wonderful facilitators of resources.

**Resources facilitator.** Resources come under different names and can be found in a variety of places. These participants believed that educators play a relevant role as facilitators of resources. According to the data, the educators in this study subscribed to the belief that a caring teacher, counselor, or administrator teaches students how to access resources, helps them identify them, and encourages them to reach out to those available. The data suggest that the people in this sample believed that caring educators help students develop the critical thinking skills that may lead them to insights which may in turn help them identify their capacity to be resourceful. The caring teacher is a guide who does not give his or her students the answers to their dilemmas, but exhibits the patience to walk them through the process by means of Socratic questioning and modeling the thought process through out-loud thinking. They were willing to step into a parental role without overstepping the boundaries and to passionately advocate for the rights of their students. Ricardo for example said with the passing of the years, he had seen students come and go. He considered himself fortunate in that some still sought him. He frequently encountered former students when out running errands and was glad to have them acknowledge and greet him as their former teacher. Ricardo said that he was not sure if his students saw him as a father figure. He said, “If they’re looking for a father that guides them, if they’re looking for a father that has a strong hand, yes. I don’t mind assuming that role.” He said that if on the flipside, “they want a father that slacks off, a father that lets them do whatever they want; I say that’s not me.”
Ricardo said that he did not believe in giving even his own children the answers to the questions they posed. He was willing to help them work things out, but not hand them the solutions. The following statement from Ricardo echoed the sentiment of the rest of the participants in regards to enabling students.

I keep telling teachers, these kids have a tough life and they don’t have the support and sometimes it’s not easy, but you cannot use that as a roadblock. Don’t let them use that as an excuse. We all encounter problems in our lives. Instead of enabling them to use that as a stumbling block, help them. Help them get over it. Say, “Ey, there are better ways. There are other ways. Don’t be afraid to try it.”

Francis posed that helping children develop resilience is definitely not about coddling them. He told me about an aunt who came to see him and told him that she was planning to buy her nephew the things he needed because his parents wouldn’t. Francis sat with her and gave her a different perspective.

I said, “Number one, don’t interfere with what the parents are doing. They are saying to him, ‘Right now, live in your reality, and your reality is that there is no money that can cover your costs to keep a cell phone,’ and then that might be impetus for him not only to get a job, but then to realize just how hard it is to work for that and appreciate everything that you finally make of yourself.”

He insisted that if we want to help children develop resilience we cannot enable them by granting all their wants and caprices. When a Latino student complained to Francis about his classes being boring. Francis said, “Really? You know they took care of that in Cuba. You know how?” Francis painted a mental picture for his student of a child who in addition to having to fulfill the duties of a student, was also charged with working
in the sugarcane fields. He told the student, “So if you’re bored, maybe what it is is that you would appreciate perhaps a life like that.”

These participants acknowledged that overcoming adversity was not easy. They believed that barriers were not impossible to traverse. For this very reason they firmly opposed enabling children by giving in to them at the first sign of frustration. The data suggest that the participants subscribed to the belief that for helping students develop resilience, encouragement and support were key factors as well as a teacher’s generosity of time and spirit. We will visit the latter momentarily, but first let us listen to Armando’s example of teaching young ones to identify and access resources and to develop self-reliance: “If they don’t know how to deal with situations on their own, how am I going to prepare them for life?”

Carmen’s story about a student named Jeff provided a practical example of how educators can assist a student without enabling him or her. Jeff’s school counselor, Mr. Rossi, included him in the trip to a high school that offered specialized programs in art and other disciplines. Jeff loved to draw and had articulated a desire to become a professional tattoo artist to Carmen, his teacher. Carmen offered Jeff advice regarding the role that he needed to play in order to gain admission into the high school that he so desperately wanted to attend the following year. “Now, you need to get your dad down there and do the paper work. Mr. Rossi already did what he could do. Now it’s your job to get everything done for you to go to that school.” She drew a mental picture for Jeff and tried to get him to visualize what it would be like when he reached his career dream. She told him that in the future his business would be even better than “Florida Ink,” a tattoo establishment which he had identified as the best in the business. She said to Jeff,
“You always have a decision to make. There are two ways. And you know what? That way that is more difficult at the end you are going to look at the rewards.”

In this case, the teacher and the counselor informed Jeff of the resources available at the school. The counselor took him there on a visit. Note that the teacher held Jeff accountable for doing his part. There are two additional things that she did. First, she expressed that this was his choice, the school that he wanted to attend, and then she provided him a mental picture of what it would be like when he reached his dream goal of becoming an artist from his point of reference. She gave the student a visual picture of his success while at the same time conveying her belief in his reaching his dream. She stated his dream as a reality in the here and now. Jeff completed the process and gained admission into his school of choice.

Dalia did the same for the young woman she helped transition into the mainstream culture and who graduated as a result of her own efforts and the support that Dalia offered her. These educators did not place judgment on the students they assisted. They offered them their unconditional positive regard and in getting to know them better they were able to identify the resources the students needed and guided them in the appropriate direction.

**The caring element.** Earlier I stated that generosity with time and of spirit surfaced as themes in the data for this study. The participants in this study seemed to believe that the amount of time, effort, and resources that educators are willing to invest in students reflects how much they care about students. Listening with empathy, providing individualized attention, advocating for the rights of their students, protecting,
feeding, and sharing material goods surfaced as ways in which they believed teachers can help students develop resilience. This is especially when there is no other adult in their lives who is willing, or able to give them the time or attention. The following stories and quotes illustrate these findings:

One of Claudia’s students in elementary school had been raped by a cousin in the state where the child resided before she became Claudia’s student. The girl had kept this a secret because she had been too afraid to tell. Claudia had developed a trusting relationship with the child who decided to confide in her. Claudia empathized with the child. She said, “Y las dos nos pusimos a llorar. [And we both began to cry.]” Claudia knew that as a teacher she had to report the information and follow district protocol. She gave the child encouragement and support throughout the process. Within hours the man was arrested in the other state. Claudia said, “Cuando se graduó me escribió una carta tan bella dándome las gracias por todo el apoyo que yo le había dado. Y ahora mismo ella se graduó en la universidad de escritora. [When she graduated [high school] she wrote me such a beautiful letter thanking me for all the support that I had given her. Just recently, she graduated from college with a degree in journalism.]”

Caring in many instances took the form of protection. Julia told me about one of the many times when she stepped in to protect one of her students. Steven was a gay male attending classes at Julia’s high school. Students would make fun of him in school. When Julia witnessed the teasing in her classroom she decided to immediately put a stop to it. She sent Steven out of the room on an errand and while he was gone she taught the rest of the class a lesson about respect. That was the last time any of her students bothered Steven. In fact, she said that they befriended him. Julia said, “And then after that it was
like everybody respected him. He would help them out with the work, whatever they had to do on computers and he was really good.” She believed by actively fostering an accepting environment in her classroom she facilitated Steven’s transformation within the classroom from being a victim to becoming an accepted member of the group.

Viviana told me that she actively advocated for gay and lesbian students in her school and with the parents. Many students, most of them shyly, had “come out of the closet to me.” She was accepting and supportive of all of her students. For example, at the time of this study, Viviana was actively engaged in advocacy efforts on behalf of a female student who had been shunned by the school as a result of an unplanned pregnancy. She said, “I never want to have that “ay bendito” [oh poor thing] moment with them when they already feel down about themselves.”

Emma said that it was important for teachers to show students that they cared about them by celebrating their accomplishments. She felt that this was relevant because she had met so many students who desperately needed to feel like they belonged. She believed that teachers who cared took steps to convey to students “that you feel like you’re part of the family who enjoys receiving the good news of their success and you really celebrate it, and then they say ‘Oh, she cares. He cares.’” Emma could be frequently found spending money out of pocket for special gifts to celebrate student accomplishments and other events. Like Emma, many of the other participants spoke of making students feel wanted and cared for.

The participants in this study believed that there was a huge difference between truly caring about students and the rhetoric of care. Caring to them was more than just verbally expressing those feelings to students and to students’ parents. It entailed sharing
time, giving advice, and never judging. Caring about students for these participants sometimes involved taking risks. For example, in an era when frivolous lawsuits abounded, participants who provided transportation for students in their personal vehicles risked having an accident with a student on board and then facing legal action from the parents. Additionally, the possibility of a false accusation was undeniably there.

Perhaps the participants who took these risks believed that human beings are essentially good, but let us consider another possibility. Is it reasonable to think that they did not consider the possible risks because they truly regarded their students as family? Generally speaking, when a person gets into a vehicle with a family member they do not board it with the fear that they will get sued by the person if they have an accident. The data from this study suggest that most of the participants thought of their students as family. For example, Carmen said, “I see my students like my own kids and I treat them the way I like teachers to treat my own sons.” Elisa referred to her students as “Esos hijos adoptivos míos.... [Those adoptive children of mine . . .]”

There were other stories that illustrated how these educators felt about their students and how they showed it through their interactions with them. For example, Dalia helped a grandmother access the resources to protect her grandson’s right under special education law to graduate. This young man, abandoned by his parents had been raised by his grandmother and wanted her to be proud of him. Thanks to Dalia’s advocacy and to the grandmother’s efforts, he graduated. Dalia saw this case through to the end as he came to personally deliver an invitation for her to attend his graduation. On graduation day, Dalia was there and the young ROTC cadet walked across the stage in full regalia and received his diploma. Another is the story of the former student who at the hospital
while in labor called for the teacher who had held her to very high expectations in high school asking that she be present at the birth of her first child. She asked the teacher to be the baby’s godmother and named the child after her. That teacher was Julia. Julia said, “In our culture it is like if something were to happen to the parents, you take over. You are going to be the parent of that child. So for me it’s an honor.”

The student in Julia’s story was attending college pursuing a nursing degree. Prom tickets, food, students brought home to be protected from domestic turmoil, recognition gifts bought out of pocket to reward children who worked hard at school without having anyone at home to encourage them and many other vignettes of what they believed caring teachers did abounded in the data. These educators saw their students as family as evidenced by their words. They referred to their students as “my family,” “sons,” “adoptive children,” “my baby or babies” and “my kids” among others. These are not to be understood as patronizing or condescending terms, nor were these educators, lonesome world wonderers looking for someone to attach to. They are terms of endearment that express how these educators’ felt about the students they served and sometimes, the only terms of endearment that some of their students got to hear. They seemed to hold students to high expectations while providing them with love and support. For example, during our last interview Claudia said, “Yo no les dejo pasar a mis estudiantes cuando hacen algo incorrecto porque yo los considero como si fueran mis hijos. [I do not let my students get away [with anything] when they do something wrong because I consider them as if they were my children.]” Claudia said that she was certain that her students knew that she loved them and that she believed in each one’s capacity to rise above adversity.
Their stories suggest that in order to support students’ development of resilience, teachers need to care and care deeply while holding them accountable for the choices they make. The data suggest that the resilients in this study believed that teachers could influence students in a positive way. In their estimation however, that power resided beyond the limits of the rhetoric of care and in the realm of caring actions. For them teaching and learning was not only about the content areas, it entailed the whole student and the whole teacher. The following quote is a good example of the content area versus whole child dichotomy and what the educators seemed to think about teachers who care. Francis said,

*I know you have this curriculum to teach. You’re under pressure to get through, but more and more I see some of the young teachers going beyond that and looking at the whole child. “Hmm, I’m going to teach you Math, but just noticed that it’s winter and you’re in slippers. It is winter and you have worn the same tee shirt three days in a row, because it’s the only [one you have]. On Monday it was white. Today it looks like heather gray.” So you know when you are working with children as a new teacher, besides just letting a student know that you’re aware of their weaknesses or how well they are doing in your subject area, and of course many teachers do this, they go beyond and that’s engagement. You know you say “Oh I love my students.” “Really? You have four soccer players on your team. Have you been to any of their games after school? Have you at least tried to make one of their games? That would make them feel so good. “You bothered to come and pay attention to me someplace outside of your classroom. Maybe the next time I go in there I’ll bother to pay attention to what it is that you want to teach*
me about something that I can completely not understand or completely hate to the point I want to vomit and I just want to cut your class and not go.” So there are some new teachers that we have here who are very much like that, and they have families, and so maybe they’ll run home, pick up their two kids from daycare or whatever and go to the soccer game and not only do that, but bring cupcakes or bring some kind of refreshment or bring the kids cookies or candy or something, just anything.

Francis’s perspective on teachers who care seemed to imply a tall order. As mentioned before this is an example of the types of things that the participants spoke about; the types of things they had done. The theme of generosity with time and of spirit permeates throughout this quote. These are things that no school district can impose. This seems true even for those school systems that could possibly make teachers give extra time as a condition for hiring. What these participants described abides at a higher level. It was not about being there because they had to be, or pretending to listen while visions of other things orbited their heads. It was more than engaging in charitable acts. The data suggest that the participants perceived an emotional connection as the cornerstone for teachers to effectively play a role in helping students develop the skills to overcome adversity. Similarly to what Fiol-Matta (1996) had expressed about her approach to teaching, they seemed to view their relationships with students as a mutual exchange of intangible goods that contributed to the self efficacy of both sages: the student, and the teacher. Julia stated it when she said that it takes, “Time, attention, communication, love because to be a teacher you have to love your profession.” She believed that the work could be draining and that doing it well required large time investments. She said, “Each
one of these kids is going to influence us as well because not only do we teach them, but by them we learn. So it’s an ongoing process of sharing and learning from one another.”

**Final Thoughts**

The data suggest that the participants in this study had developed theories of resilience based on their experiences with the phenomenon. Marino-Weisman (2001) recommended that teachers reflect on their own experiences as bilingual, bicultural individuals in order to become effective models who promote the success of minority students. The data in this study suggest that these participants frequently engaged in this type of reflection. One can apply these dynamics to the development of resilience. The participants in this study seemed to draw from their experiences with bilingualism and also from their experiences with resilience in their efforts to promote not only the success of Latino and other minority students, but also for students of other cultural backgrounds.

First and foremost, the findings suggest that the study participants believed that educators can indeed impact students’ development of resilience. These findings concur with Reis et al. (2005) whose research conclusions pointed to teachers, administrators, counselors, and coaches as key elements in promoting students’ development of resilience. The participants in this study asserted that in order for educators to effectively play this key role, a number of conditions needed to be present. First of all the teacher must love his or her profession, care deeply about students, and be willing to expend the energy and resources that it takes to show it. To them, sharing stories of resilience provides students with hope that they too can alter their future outcomes. According to the data, the participants believed that educators need to be willing to serve as guides,
sounding boards and advisors to students in need. They need to engage students in the steps of goal setting by teaching them critical thinking skills that may lead to new insights about self and others.

The participants deemed generosity of time and resources beyond the classroom important as in their experience, these constituted a tool for opening communication lines that led to emotional connections whose byproducts were improved academic performance and goal attainment. The findings also suggest that these resilients valued diversity and were respectful of their students’ cultural identities. Freire (1998) might have applauded them as their position regarding cultural diversity seemed harmonious with his assertion that teachers respecting and valuing their students’ cultural identities promote a balanced and edifying learning relationship that encourages students’ intellectual growth. The findings in this study seem in tune with the reflections of critical theorists such as Souto-Manning (2006), Freire (1993, 1998), and hooks (1994) regarding the transformative and liberating power of education. For these participants, teaching seemed to have a life-changing quality that transcended the point when they chose it as a career. They, as suggested by Fiol-Matta, Freire and hooks, seemed to view the learning relationship as more than a mere unidirectional transfer of knowledge. They seemed to be living what Freire averred when he submitted that learning happens in and beyond the classroom and by means of more than educational tools. A snippet of a moment in time or even a simple gesture can educe it.

These participants, in like fashion with Souto-Manning, believed in advocacy and in working to develop students’ sense of self worth, in spite of the powers that be which Chomsky (2000) had identified earlier as a major force in an educational system that
leads what he called a “bewildered herd,” (p. 23) to the perpetuation of the status quo.

The participants in this study seemed to frequently challenge the status quo in regards to the limiting beliefs guiding actions against or on behalf of their students. This was true even when the student in question was not Latino.

The findings suggest that although sharing the same cultural background with students may facilitate the development of good teacher-student rapport (Delgado, 1997), the absence of a shared cultural background was not viewed as detrimental to teachers’ capacity to help students develop the skills that the participants believed lead to overcoming adversity. This constitutes an interesting finding in light of Delgado’s conclusion that shared cultural knowledge, beliefs, and/or experiences with students may constitute an advantage in working to inspire Puerto Rican students to rise above the odds. The findings suggest that for the participants in this study shared cultural backgrounds are secondary to genuine active [emphasis added] positive regard in helping students develop resilience. Showing empathy, being a good listener who is sensitive to students’ needs, helping students access and identify resources, and student advocacy all seemed to complete the list of elements in the participants’ collective thoughts regarding how teachers can help students develop resilience. It bears restating that the participants in this study adamantly opposed enabling and pitying students. This is not to be misunderstood as a recommendation to ignore students’ need of the support of a caring adult in school.

I close this chapter with the realization that my study participants have given me the answers to the research questions I posed regarding their beliefs about teaching and resilience. The fear of coming up empty handed subsides. Turning away requires more
effort than expected, for herein lie truths that beckon me to return and reflect some more, this time, on my own experiences as a resilient and an educator. I slowly let go and with the strike of each key inch my way closer to the final chapter: the one where the articulations of their meaning of resilience reside. It has been a long journey, but as the light beams at us from the other end of the tunnel, I ask you to remain. Travel with me once more and as we arrive to our final destination, let us enter the place where their meaning of resilience resides.
CHAPTER VII

Iterations of Resilience

When I was a little girl, my mother came home one day with a long playing vinyl record of an anthology of fairytales. I spent hours lying on my stomach on the hard linoleum floor, legs bent at the knees and crossed suspended above my backside, my head held up by the makeshift scaffolds of my palms. In that position I traveled through dark forests meeting wolves, witches, and good fairies along the way. The visions educed by the descriptions auditorily conveyed by the masterful weavers of those tales enthralled and amazed me at every turn of each imaginary bend. I never felt scared. Engaged in a mental bustle of rustic problem solving, I tried over and over to place myself in the role of heroine and figure out how I might change the outcome of the story through alternate choices. Always hopeful, I imagined colorful flowers lining each path and interminable tonalities of green adding to the lush panorama. Similar to that of the participants in this study, my optimism fueled my belief that other endings might indeed be feasible.

Resilience, according to the participants in this study, is largely contingent on how an individual perceives his or her environment, situations, self, and others. The data suggest that the resilient in this sample viewed adversity as an integral part of their resilience. They posed that the hardships they encountered in life made them stronger. Travelers through the dark forests of adversity, they seem to have always looked for the lessons to be learned, backpacking them and taking them on their journeys while leaving the useless brush behind. Resilience for these participants seems to have required focusing on the possibilities and learning from mistakes. The data suggest that to them
resilience was more about where they were going and where that journey took them than about their points of departure.

They did not internalize or personalize the negative actions or words of people in their lives or see themselves as victims. Resilience to them came as a byproduct of key personal attributes, aspirations, and dreams, and an unrelenting desire to thrive. Tenacity, faith, gratitude, respect for self and others, generosity, self-reliance, sense of agency and the ability to identify and access resources featured among the characteristics that they collectively identified as precursors to and facilitators of their resilience. The data suggest that the support and positive regard of caring adults, whether blood related or not, constituted a promotive factor in the lives of these participants. Most of the people in this study found at least one caring adult in school who conveyed hope through their words and actions. Strong cultural identity surfaced as another factor that this group related to their resilience.

The participants related family values and education to their resilience. For them, anybody can develop resilience. They seemed to say that resilience is an ordinary thing that people do even when the term may be unknown to them. The data from this study suggest that when it comes to resilience, in the battle of nature versus nurture, nurture takes the lead. The relevance that the participants assigned to role models at home, in the community, culture, and school, support the conclusion that when speaking of resilience, nurture matters most. To the participants in this study, resilience was not only about taking, it was about giving; thus generosity surfaced as a relevant theme in their meaning of the phenomenon. They reflected on what resilience meant to them based on their experiences with the construct.
It is possible, as I had stated earlier in this dissertation, that the participants’ meaning of resilience may evolve with time. For example, their participation in this study may have led them to new insights as they took inventory of their life trajectories. When I asked Armando about his thoughts regarding the construct he started his response with, “It might have changed,” suggesting what I have posed that recapturing his stories of resilience for this study may have provided him as well as the others with an opportunity to take a more in depth look at their experiences with the construct.

**Conclusions**

The findings in this study are consistent with what experts in the field of resilience had elucidated through their research. Masten (2001) had posed that for resilience to manifest, the presence of conflict must be present. The participants’ meaning of resilience concurs with Masten’s conclusion as they identified adversity as a contributing factor to their resilience. Like the pinch of salt that brings out the sweetness of other ingredients in a dessert, adversity, to them, was a catalyst for their resilience to manifest.

Consistent with what Clinton (2008) had submitted earlier, the participants believed that being resilient is to thrive in the presence of problems. They frequently referred to moving forward rather than to bouncing back, suggesting that to them resilience is about thriving and not just reverting to the status quo that existed before a disruptive life event. Werner in 1984 had defined resiliency as “the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or sustained life stress” (p. 68). Clinton defined it as the ability to bounce back. The meaning of resilience that the participants in this study
conveyed, confirms what others (Clinton, 2008; Masten, 2001, Rutter, 2007), had stated earlier. That is that the phenomenon of resilience is a process and not a trait. Rutter in 2006 had described resilience as “an interactive concept” (p.2). The participants in this study described resilience as resulting from an interactive process between key personal characteristics and environmental factors. Consistent with Ungar (2004a), the participants’ meaning of resilience points to their contextual reality as an important factor in the construction of their meaning of resilience. This contextual reality is inexorably seen, as Ungar had suggested, through the lens of their cultural values and cultural identities. Thus Ungar’s advice that the cultural dimension be included in the definition of the phenomenon of resilience applies here. Clinton (2008) and Masten (2009) concluded that resilience can be learned and posited that there can be a late onset of resilience. The participants in this study seemed to agree. Some of the participants expressed not knowing that they had it in them to be resilient. In fact, one of them went as far as to say that before coming to the U.S. she would have called her resilience simply determination. Thus the question remains.

What marks the onset of resilience as an identifiable personal reality? Is it like the age old question about whether a tree falling in the forest makes a sound if there is no one there to hear it? It seems that at least in some cases, the ears of the beholder, in this instance, the researcher, may have acted as a catalyst to some of the participants’ realization that indeed they were resilient. The stories became crucial as they provided the evidence first to the participants themselves that resilience was a phenomenon that they had experienced even if they did not own it by name prior to the onset of their participation in this study.
They fluently articulated the risk and promotive factors that they believed worked together allowing them to thrive in the face of adversity. This confirmed what researchers in the field had posed about risk and protective factors interacting in different ways that promote or hinder the development of resilience (Hjendal et al., 2006; Masten, 2009; Rutter, 2006).

The participants in this study had been wounded at times. They danced on the ledge of precipices posing grave dangers to their life outcomes had they taken a fall. While others in their positions may have lost their balance and perished, these resilients not only regained it but managed to move forward and past the point where they began. They had arrived at a place where they felt a sense of satisfaction with the things that they had accomplished in life and experienced joy in being able to help others on their paths to personal success however they may define it.

Scholars have agreed that resilience and invulnerability are not congruent terms and that it is possible that there are resilient people who have been wounded (Clinton, 2008, Hunter, 2001). Masten (2009) described resilience as ordinary. Perhaps this may provide an explanation for why the participants in this study were not boastful of their resilience. To them, it was something that came as a byproduct of the interaction between the good and bad in their lives. They identified positive role models and caring adults within the family, school and or community as promotive of their resilience.

Opportunities for involvement in school, church and the community surfaced as positive promoters of resilience for the participants. Key personal characteristics such as intuition, self reliance, discernment, enterprise, respect for self and others, risk-taking, imagination, optimism, humor and spirituality among others constituted a part of what
they identified as promotive factors within. Thus earlier findings regarding resilient people and their ability to identify and access external and internal resources in order to get to where they need to go (Masten, 2009), seem consistent with the findings in this study.

**Answering the Research Questions**

Effectively closing this discussion warrants an articulation of the study participants’ meaning of the phenomenon under study. I primarily sought to uncover what resilience meant for a group of Puerto Rican educators who had overcome adversity.

The definition that I had proposed earlier based on the ideas of other researchers in the field was that resilience can be understood as an ordinary, dynamic, and variable process that results from the multiple and multidirectional interactions among risk and protective factors in the individual’s internal and external, contextual, and cultural environments, which leads to extraordinary outcomes despite exposure to extreme levels of adversity expected to cause deleterious effects on the psychosocial adjustment of a human being (Clinton, 2008; Hjendal et al., 2006; Hunter, 2001; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2007; Ungar, 2004a). Although generally applicable to the findings in this study, a simpler articulation of resilience based on the findings here follows. I extracted the following definition from the data. Based on the meaning of resilience expressed by this study’s participants, *resilience is an interactive process involving key personal attributes and environmental factors within the individual’s home, community, school, and culture that results in the human ability to thrive in the face of adversity. It is ordinary, ever-
evolving, and it may or may not manifest across all aspects of a person’s life

simultaneously [emphasis added]. I created a matrix based on this definition with the intention of visually representing it. (The Balotta Resiliency Matrix can be found in Appendix E of this dissertation.) In the matrix, four quadrants represent the domains of the three environmental themes I discussed earlier, and the personal attributes domain with the good and the bad that may come along with each domain. The point of interaction between the domains is hidden behind the label “resilience” because although the data suggested that for the participants, the dynamic interactions between and within the four quadrants resulted in their resilience, the nature of the processes involved is still a mystery. Thus, it is hidden from view. According to the participants’ meaning of the phenomenon, it is easier to learn resilience than to teach it because resilience is largely dependent on how an individual chooses to perceive his or her self and his or her circumstances.

Resilience: Their Beliefs

The participants’ collective thoughts on the teaching of resilience suggest that they had constructed personal theories of resilience as a result of their experiences with the construct. This was the second question that I sought to answer. The data suggest that the participants in this study believed that we cannot teach people or students, for that matter, to be resilient, but we can assist them in changing their perspective by providing opportunities for them to redefine themselves and their environments. This is a hopeful proposition, as it lends itself to the idea that we can be powerful agents in students’ development of resilience. We must bear in mind that the people in this sample came to
these conclusions based on their own experiences. They encountered caring adults, many of them teachers who they identified as promotive factors in their resilience journeys. They had seen this principle in action during their incumbency as educators.

The participants in this study valued diversity and seemed to draw from their experiences in their efforts to promote the success of Latino students who were Second Language Learners, and also of students of other cultural backgrounds. The findings suggest that the study participants believed that educators can indeed impact students’ development of resilience albeit not directly. Reis et al. (2005) had found earlier that teachers, administrators, counselors, and coaches were key factors in promoting students’ development of resilience. The findings here concur.

**Beliefs in action.** The beliefs that the participants in this study held about resilience seemed to lead them in efforts to promote their students’ development of resilience. This constitutes an affirmation of Bomer et al. (2008) who concluded that teacher beliefs inform their practice. Most, if not all of the participants claimed to love what they did. They seemed to care deeply about their students and to invest significant amounts of energy, time and resources in them. They shared their stories of resilience with students, hoping to inspire them. They told stories of obstacles overcome in order to offer validation and create opportunities for relating with students. They all claimed the belief that all students can resile. The data convey a picture of the participants as guides, empathic listeners, advisors, and benefactors to students in need. They subscribed to the belief that engagement of students in the steps of goal-setting through the use of critical thinking skills can lead to life-altering insights. Students seemed to benefit academically
and personally from the emotional connections with these educators according to their stories.

Although the participants in the study seemed to have a strong sense of cultural identity, the data did not point to the belief that student-teacher shared cultural background is a prerequisite to teachers’ efficacy in helping students develop the skills to overcome adversity. Teachers’ genuine positive regard in action surfaced as the single most important thing that teachers can do to help students develop resilience.Confirming what Garcia (2001) had averred, the participants believed that teachers’ rejection of a student’s culture or vernacular can be detrimental to that student’s resilience and thus their potential to succeed. According to the data, these participants believed that teachers need to accept and respect their students in a holistic manner if they aim to influence their ability to overcome adversity. It bears restating. The findings from this study tell us that for these participants, sharing the same cultural background with students is secondary to genuine active positive regard in helping children, adolescents and young adults develop resilience. They adamantly opposed enabling students. In their estimation, empathy can offer people hope, but pity only provides the rope with which they may manage to tie themselves to the anchors of hopelessness and helplessness which may make it impossible for them to rise above the odds.

**Study Limitations**

The sample for this study was a purposive convenience sample (Creswell, 1998; 2009); therefore, selection bias constitutes one of the limitations of the study. The sample size is also a limitation even though it falls within the parameters of appropriate sample
size for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2009; Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2007). This poses a limit to the confidence with which the findings can be generalized to the population of interest. Notwithstanding, it is important to note that neither an increase nor a decrease in the number of participants would have yielded a different set of findings as with this sample. The trustworthiness of the findings here lies in the recursiveness of the themes that surfaced from the data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Because the data generated came from self reports, it is not possible to claim a statistically significant relationship between the construct under study and the variables that emerged from the data.

On the positive side, the participants were a homogeneous group in terms of ethnicity, level of education, and type of population with which they worked. All of the participants worked in an urban district having direct contact with students of diverse cultural backgrounds. Each participant fit the criteria set for the sample selection as described in chapter three of this dissertation. Another strong feature of this study is that the researcher was of the same ethnic group as the participants and fully bilingual. I believe that I was able to capture nuances and iterations that are culturally characteristic of the group and might have been missed by a researcher outside of the Puerto Rican culture. Additionally, I did not have to depend on outside sources for translations of Spanish quotes. I produced the translations needed and was able to check with the participants for accuracy. This is not to be understood as an insinuation that a researcher who is a member of another cultural group could not have done the job. He or she might have had to work harder in order to build trust and to elicit the same responses from the participants.
Additionally, no power differences existed between the participants and me, aside from those that may have been perceived as a result of our respective roles of researcher and participants. Had I not been the researcher in this study, I could have been a participant, as I fit the criteria inasmuch as I am Puerto Rican, a self-reported resilient, possess an educational level beyond a bachelor’s degree, and work in an urban district in direct contact with students of diverse cultural backgrounds. The latter may have positively influenced the participants’ openness regarding issues or experiences that they would expect a person of the same cultural group and career field might more readily understand and be less likely to judge. Because I was not considered by this group to be a representative of the U.S. mainstream society, they may have felt more inclined to express critical views of mainstream culture and their experiences with racial or cultural discrimination or prejudice. The responses were candid and sincere as far as I could ascertain.

In my experience, I tend to be more colorful in my writing than in my speech. I believe that writing affords one an unparalleled opportunity to stop to choose the best way to articulate one’s thoughts. The participants in this study had the chance to do just that because one of the interviews was in written form, without limitations as to how long or short their responses were. This served as a tool for triangulation purposes as well as their collection of photographs and other documents that they chose to share.

Finally, we need to exercise care not to generalize the results of this study to other Latino populations as there are significant cultural and ethnic identity variations among Latino groups. Puerto Rico’s unique sociopolitical status and history as a colony, or if you would prefer a territory of the United States has implications for the Puerto Rican
Diaspora that greatly differ from other Latino groups in the country as discussed in the literature review chapter of this dissertation.

**Implications**

Confirming Hendershott’s (2009) conclusion that teachers can have a positive impact in the lives of students who have been severely battered by the blows of adversity, the most significant implication of the findings of this study for teachers, counselors, mentors, and representatives of other community organizations seems to be that there is hope even for those who have been wounded by deleterious factors. Notwithstanding, caveat emptor, yes, buyer beware as plunging into this type of endeavor does not come without a cost, even though the rewards far outweigh the investment. Good intentions alone seem to fall short when trying to help others develop the skills to overcome adversity. That caring must be accompanied with the appropriate actions is what these participants said.

As Piirto (2002a) theorized, and the findings here concur, the “sun of school” can be a saving grace when the other environmental “suns” refuse to shine brightly in the life of an individual. The participants in this study shared stories of how caring adults in their institutions of learning provided encouragement, protection and help. Practical applications of how we can help can be found in their stories. They are here for all to see. If these participants’ appraisal of resilience is correct, and a perusal through the extant literature would find confirmation in the conclusions of experts in this field, then there is always hope. There was a time when people thought that a person was either resilient or not, suggesting that those unlucky enough to be born without the trait were doomed to
Poor life outcomes (Richardson, 2002). Thanks to trailblazers in the field like Garmezy, Werner, Smith, Masten, and Rutter, just to mention a few, we now know better. Collaboration between religious organizations, cultural and community organizations, and schools to provide students and their families with alternatives for identifying and accessing resources may help educators with limited time and resources to provide students and their families with much needed support. It seems plausible that finding ways to provide students with the opportunity to learn and develop key character values may help them in the task of overcoming barriers to their resilience.

We all know about the debate that exists in the U.S. regarding immigration and whether or not English is the only language acceptable for instructional purposes. One would have to be deaf and blind in order to believably claim that we are not aware of this. The data here indicate that regardless of our personal positions on these matters, as educators, we must value and respect our students’ cultural backgrounds if we aim to help them overcome their odds. This seems particularly, but not exclusively true for students of diverse cultures for whom the U.S. is a new ecological and social environment. The participants in this study spoke about seeing and treating their students as if they were their own children or as they would like teachers to treat their offspring. One can only wonder about what might happen if we each saw our own in the faces of the children we purport to serve and care about.

For those needing encouragement and access to resources the findings here imply that rejecting support from another person just because they are not from our cultural group may constitute a lost opportunity that may never come again. Remember, Ricardo might have never become a teacher if he had disregarded his supervisor’s advice and
encouragement because the man was not Puerto Rican. The participants in this study received encouragement from different people along the way. The data showed that their parents expected them to respect their elders and defer to them. It is possible that this learned attitude of respect for authority figures played a role in the participants’ ability to elicit help from adults during their childhoods and from superiors or other authority figures during adulthood. Note that they learned to give respect in order to get it. In my experience of almost three decades in the field of education, I have seen this change. Frequently we hear children state that they do not give respect unless they get it first. Perhaps we need to rethink what we are teaching our youth about this character value.

The participants in this study rarely quoted biblical references, however the data tell us that they were faithful and altruistic people who were grateful for what they had achieved and generous with other people. They subscribed to a belief in a higher power that was far from deterministic. The implication here seems to be that it is possible to reach a happy medium between spirituality and ambition. Based on the data derived from the stories of the participants in this study, resilience is achievable for all. Is it easy? The participants’ answer to that was an emphatic no, however, with the appropriate attitude and supports it is most definitely doable.

**Recommendations for future research**

My hope is that this study and its findings may serve as a springboard to many other study ideas in the field of resilience. I believe that as much as has been written in this area, there is still so much that we do not know. For example, there may be some benefits to conducting qualitative comparative case studies with Puerto Ricans comparing
groups of resilient and non resilient same gendered participants. The findings from these types of studies may contain implications that could potentially inform interventions in educational and institutional programs serving Puerto Rican males and females and aimed at assisting them in their development of resilience and goal attainment. Future research in the phenomenon is warranted, particularly with adults, if we believe that there can be a late onset of the phenomenon of resilience as suggested by Masten and by the findings in this study. Replicating this study with a much larger sample of Puerto Ricans might offer the basis for developing a theory of resilience that addresses the unique sociopolitical contextual particularities of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. A mixed methods approach to studying resilience with this population might include measures of acculturation, emotional intelligence and other inventories such as self-regulation measures and values scales. Combining the latter with phenomenological and ethnographic methods in the qualitative research tradition may offer exciting possibilities for new insights.

Another area that we may want to investigate is the connection between culture, spirituality and resilience. These participants were taught the principles of Christian faith that some (Rondón, 2003; Stycos, 1952; Suárez-Findlay, 1999) have claimed to be closely tied to the cultural values of Puerto Ricans and that we have inherited from colonial times. Most of them related their resilience to their spirituality. Are there key spiritual elements which may act as catalysts to a person’s resilience? What are they and how do they manifest? The participants in this study made it clear, the answer regarding the faith aspect lies beyond religion. I think this area warrants further investigation.

Poverty is another factor that I believe warrants attention from a more positive
perspective as the findings here suggest that there is hope to be found in the different perceptions of poverty that those experiencing it may choose to have. We cannot assume that all people living in poverty hold the same values. Could it be possible that people living within the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder and who have adopted values that have been generally assigned to the middle class (Borman & Overman, 2004; Payne, 2005) may have higher aspirations than their cohorts living in the same conditions? Do those aspirations influence their resilience and thus their potential for academic and personal success? I believe that a more in-depth look at the concept of poverty as a risk factor to resilience is warranted. Is the weight that has been traditionally assigned to poverty as a risk factor in resilience contingent on the social values held by resilient individuals who have experienced it?

This study highlighted environmental and personality factors that the participants believed impacted their resilience. What if we turned our focus to the investigation of how, or if the process of resilience has an impact on the individual’s environment? Findings from such an inquiry could shed some light on the hidden processes that Masten (2001), as well as Ungar (2003) said we still do not even begin to fully understand.

Interesting insights may await researchers investigating culture-specific gender role expectations from a machismo vantage point and how they may or may not relate to career choices for Latino males. Do less numbers of Latino males choose teaching careers as compared to other cultural groups for whom the concept of machismo may not be as prevalent? What implications may those findings have for the fields of higher education and career counseling?
It may be both interesting, and exciting to research Puerto Rican Racial Identity in light of Helms’s (1993) theory of Black Racial Identity and to search for possible relationships between the stages of racial identity and resilience. Does a person’s evolution through the stages of racial identity as described by Helms (1993) influence their resilience, and how?

Finally, our federal government tends to favor a positivist approach to studying student achievement (Ungar, 2006) which I believe largely ignores the affective components of the teaching and learning relationship. I wish I could claim this as a new insight, but it lacks that distinction. Scholars have noted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Canella, 2004; Ungar, 2006) the debility of quantitative approaches in relation to the educational process. Hence the proliferation of present day mixed methods studies. They satisfy funding requirements while also attempting to uncover the processes hidden from view. These processes hidden in what I see as a magician’s hat of the educational persuasion, may explain how the rabbit or educational outcomes came to be. For example, studying the theories of resilience of educators and how they manifest in their daily practice seems warranted as my review of the literature found that the field lacks information on this topic. Mixed methods studies with educators working in areas serving large culturally diverse populations might offer pragmatic examples and a glimpse into what we can do within our educational institutions to reclaim our youth. Especially in urban settings such as the one where the participants in this study worked.
I was a recipient of the kindness that for these participants seemed to translate into service. I conducted several interviews at the homes of the participants. Every single one of them went out of his or her way to make me feel welcomed. Each one either had appetizers, lunch, or dinner for me. Most of the time the meals were ready before I got there, but on a few occasions the participant did not let me go once the interview had concluded until I had something to eat. In my experience, this is an integral part of Puerto Rican hospitality, but it also spoke to me about the generosity of these individuals. This seems as good a time as any to offer a word of advice to researchers interested in conducting interviews with this population. Be prepared to graciously accept a culinary offering from your participants lest you jeopardize the development of trust in your relationship with them. How can I accept your claims of acceptance and positive regard if you refuse to partake of something that is such a part of who I am as a cultural being? I suspect that this may be true for many cultural groups, but I can only speak of what I know. Puerto Ricans, as the participants in this study articulated and demonstrated are a hospitable and warm people.

The callousness of discrimination and our colonial history may find some of us distrustful of other groups purporting to want to sincerely understand us and then share it with the world. For example, one of my participants shared with me that she had participated in a research study conducted by a researcher who was Latino but not Puerto Rican. When she read the quotations from her interviews embedded in the research report, she found what to her seemed like a mockery. Every one of her English quotations had been transcribed reflecting her marked Spanish accent. This drove her to
ask me if I was going to do the same. I responded that this was not a dissertation on linguistics and she retorted that neither was the other one. It is not my place to investigate this story any further. As a new researcher I have my hands full passing judgment on myself as I mentally relive every step of this process. As the reader is my witness, the quotations embedded in this work are void of the accentual color strokes of my participants’ words. Their voices in this dissertation rise out of the darkness of anonymity like the voice of the minute coqui in the nocturnal blackness to tell us that they are here and that they will continue to thrive.

I close the final chapter of this dissertation releasing you from the role of travel companion through the pages of this work. You, my dear reader, were faithfully there when as a tentative and clumsy toddler I wrote the first words of the beginning chapter of this dissertation. As I imagine you turning your back and walking away, I cannot help but wonder what you think and if any of the insights here have had a lasting effect on you. Wait! I cannot read your non verbal cues and again I stand alone.

Exhausted from the journey, I sit and reflect on what I have learned and what first drove me to this venture. While I have not answered all the questions in my mind about the phenomenon of resilience, the experts in the field provided a solid foundation empowering me to dare to ask the questions guiding this study. My participants provided me with the answers. This ending marks the attainment of a dream, but not an end in itself. I now experience this surge of energy born out of a compelling sense of responsibility to share what I have learned. It is as though my participants handed me a prized possession with the expectation that I as a good steward will invest it well. And so, as you disappear behind the veil of distance, I bid you *hasta luego* (until later) for the
forever budding writer in me knows about the inescapability and transitoriness of this farewell.
REFERENCES


Como el cantar del coquí 357


Como el cantar del coquí 364


Como el cantar del coquí


Como el cantar del coquí 368


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
CONSENT FORM
(Participant Consent)
“Como el cantar del coqui: Educators of the Puerto Rican Diaspora Describe What Resilience Means to Them”

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND
Mrs. Maria Balotta, a candidate to the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership in Ashland University’s Doctoral Studies Department, is conducting a research study to try to describe what resilience means to Puerto Rican educators who have overcome adversity. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have experience regarding the topics of this study.

B. PROCEDURES
If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will participate in three interviews. The first two will be face to face interviews which will last for a period of approximately 90 minutes and will be audio and video taped. A third interview will be conducted by electronic mail.

2. You will be asked to share proof of Puerto Rican ethnicity. This may be a birth certificate, baptismal record or other legal document stating that you were born in Puerto Rico or of Puerto Rican parents. (The researcher will not retain the original records, but may reproduce them in film or electronically.)

3. You will be asked to share documents that represent disruptive life events, such as photographs, divorce decrees, death certificates, school records, teachers’ notes and any other document that represents a symbol of adversities that you have encountered in your life. (The researcher will not retain the original records, but may reproduce them in film or electronically.)

4. You will be asked to share documents, artifacts or photographs that symbolize triumph over adversity for you or represent the meaning of resilience for you. (The researcher will not retain the original records or artifacts, but may reproduce them in film or electronically.)

5. You will be given a disposable camera to take pictures of documents, artifacts, photos, places or activities that have been important to your resilience or represent resilience in your life. I will develop the film and the pictures will not be seen by anyone but you and me unless you decide to share them with others.

6. Your name will be kept confidential and will not be shared on the research report.
7. You are free to decide if you want to participate in this study or not.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. When we first begin to talk, you may feel somewhat shy about talking about yourself with me. You can ask me any questions you may have about this study.

2. As I observe or interview you, I may take notes and you may feel uneasy. The notes will be used to help me understand your experiences and will not be attached to your name.

3. Confidentiality: Participation in research will involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled confidentially. I will use pseudonyms to protect your identity in the study findings for this dissertation and in any report or publication that may result from this study. The raw data will be securely kept in a locked cabinet until the expiration date approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at which time the raw data will be shredded to further protect your right to confidentiality.

Only I, Maria Balotta, and my doctoral dissertation chair will have access to your study records and recorded media. Note that information disclosed that concerns harm to you, the participant, another person or another person’s property is not protected by researcher-participant confidentiality.

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide may help education professionals gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of resilience and inspire them to explore how their own meaning of the construct may or may not manifest in their daily interactions with students. Your insights may inspire others to reframe their perceptions of low SES and minority, particularly Latinos’ and or Puerto Ricans’ ability to overcome adversity and their sources of strength. It is possible that your story will help other education professionals acquire a more hopeful outlook regarding their role in helping students develop resilience.

E. COSTS

There will be no cost to you as a result of taking part in this study.

F. PAYMENT

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary.
G. QUESTIONS

You have talked to Mrs. Maria Balotta about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have further questions, you may call her at (216) 459-3128 or (440) 263-6112.

If you have any comments or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact the Human Subjects Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00 and 5:00, Monday through Friday, by calling or writing….

Randy Gearhart, Chair Human Subjects Review Board
Phone: (419) 207-6198
Fax: (419) 289-5460
E-mail: rgearhar@ashland.edu

H. CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.
PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as an educator, acquaintance or other.

I _______________________ have had all my present questions regarding this study answered. I clearly understand the procedures and expectations for participation in this study. I agree to participate. In testimony thereof my signature is hereby affixed.

______________________________________________________________________
Date Signature of Study Participant

______________________________________________________________________
Date Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
Como el Cantar del Coquí:

Educators of the Puerto Rican Diaspora in the U. S.

Describe What Resilience Means to Them

Maria Balotta

Permission to Audio and/or Videotape

I, ____________________________, as a voluntary participant in Maria Balotta’s study grant my permission to be interviewed and/or observed. I grant Maria permission to audio and/or video-tape these interviews and/or observations for the collection of data for her research on Puerto Rican educators and resilience.

I understand that the purpose of the research is to describe how Puerto Rican educators who have overcome adversity describe their meaning of resilience.

I understand that studies of sufficient quality may be submitted to scholarly Journals, to professional conferences or may become published books. I understand I will not be named in reports of the results of the research. If I feel my rights have been violated I will contact Dr. Randall Gearhart, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board, at (419) 289-6198. I understand that I may withdraw from being included in the research results, with my written request to Dr. Piirto.

Signature ___________________________ Date ____________________
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS
Interview 1 Protocol

1. What comes to your mind when hear the word resilience?
   Where do you think resilience comes from?
   What would you say are characteristics of resilient people?

2. Tell me stories about times during your childhood when you encountered adversity.
   How did you cope?
   Who did you seek help from?
   Who or what helped you overcome adversity during that period of your life?

3. Tell me about what living in your house was like during the years before you started school.

4. What was your family like?

5. Tell me stories about your elementary school years.
   What was your happiest day during that time?
   What was your saddest day during that period?
   What or who helped?

6. Tell me stories about your adolescence.
   What was home life like then
7. Tell me a story about a major disappointment or obstacle that you dealt with during your adolescent years.

8. Tell me stories about major accomplishment or achievement that you experienced during your adolescent years.

9. If I had interviewed adults around you at that time, what would they have said about you?

10. If I had interviewed your peers at that time, what would they have said about you?

11. How would your teachers have described you?

12. What was your transition into adulthood like?
Como el cantar del coquí

“Como el cantar del coquí:

Educators of the Puerto Rican Diaspora Describe

What Resilience Means to Them”

Researcher: Maria Balotta

Interview 2 Protocol

Interview 2

1. Tell me stories about obstacles that you have encountered in your adult life.
   How did you make it through the situation?
   What and or who helped you overcome the situation?

2. What do you believe made a positive difference for you?

3. What do Puerto Rican/Latino students need in order to overcome obstacles and fare better than their peers?

4. What role has your ethnicity played in your experiences with adversity?

5. What role has your ethnicity played in your experiences with resilience?

6. If I were a new teacher struggling with how to help my students succeed in spite of adversity, what specific advice would you offer about helping students develop resilience?

7. The last time we spoke I asked you to take pictures of places, people, and or objects that represent resilience for you. Tell me about your choice of photos.
Como el cantar del coquí

“Como el cantar del coquí:

Educators of the Puerto Rican Diaspora Describe

What Resilience Means to Them”

Researcher: Maria Balotta

Interview 3 Protocol

1. Please include your participant number in this answer. You have been included in this study because you have experience with the topic of interest. You have faced adversity. You have risen above it and thrived. What does being resilient mean to you?

2. What do you attribute your resilience to? How did these people, places, things, or characteristics help you overcome adversity?

3. Please list as many characteristics of yours as you can, and describe how they helped you bounce back from adversity.

4. How have your experiences with adversity impacted how you approach helping students rise above the adverse conditions they face?

5. How can teachers help students overcome adversity?

6. What do you tell students is the secret to overcoming adversity?

7. What does your Puerto Rican heritage, or ethnicity mean to you?

8. How does your ethnic background inform your philosophy of teaching and helping students?

9. Please complete the following statement: For a person to overcome adversity and thrive, he or she must…. 
10. You have taken pictures of places, people, or things that are meaningful to you and your experience in overcoming adversity. List your pictures and what they mean to you. For example: Picture # 1: My mother – Mom was…
APPENDIX C

PIRRO PYRAMID OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT
Note. Used with author’s permission.
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIVE CHART
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Job Role</th>
<th>Interests</th>
<th>Identifying Quotes</th>
<th>Unique Trait</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armando</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>“…not climbing</td>
<td>Sole support of family at age 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bilingual Ed.</td>
<td>Bilingual-Education</td>
<td>palm trees dropping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>Middle School Teacher</td>
<td>Veterinary</td>
<td>“Take the blame</td>
<td>Nationalist during early adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Science/Math</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>game out of it.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>High school Teacher</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>“It’s not American.</td>
<td>Dismissed from high school due to pregnancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>It’s English.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>High school Teacher</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>“I don’t think with</td>
<td>Lived in Germany for 3 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Foreign Languages</td>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>an accent.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dalia</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>“No regrets.”</td>
<td>Parents divorced 3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>High School Teacher</td>
<td>Earth Science</td>
<td>“I like my freedom.”</td>
<td>Had a stroke</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Earth Science</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>Middle School Teacher</td>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>“I am not alone.”</td>
<td>Visited Jerusalem at age 22</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>Traditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>“Kid raised a</td>
<td>Cited Langston Hughes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>stink at the U.N.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>Vocational Ed. Teacher</td>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>“No, I am not</td>
<td>Godmother to student’s baby</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>Sewing</td>
<td>stupid.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlena</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>Middle School Teacher</td>
<td>Decorating</td>
<td>“I have it blessed</td>
<td>Scars from corporal punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Entertaining</td>
<td>by God.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>High School Teacher</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>“Where I’m coming</td>
<td>Cafeteria lady mistook him for a student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Tech</td>
<td>Cars/Houses</td>
<td>from.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viviana</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>Family-Therapy</td>
<td>“I’m their first</td>
<td>House-sat for a wealthy family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wealthy lifestyle</td>
<td>call for help.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

BALOTTA RESILIENCE MATRIX
Como el cantar del coquí

Balotta Resilience Matrix

Interrelationship Adversity/Protective Factors

Environmental Factors and Personal Attributes Impact Resilience

Point of intersection