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EXPECTING THE BEST: CASE STUDIES OF RESILIENT MEXICAN AMERICAN GIRLS IN A SOUTH TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
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ABSTRACT

This document addresses the ways a small sample of Mexican American adolescent girls cope with conditions in their lives that are beyond their control and commonly regarded as "at-risk" indicators for academic failure. In particular, it explores the following: the role school plays in their lives; the ways in which they view themselves and their places in the world; the extent to which they perceive their self-concepts as related to school success; the extent to which their social statuses at school, identities at home, and peer relations shape their self-concepts; and finally, the ways they cope with adverse events and conditions that seem to make them invulnerable to academic failure.

Exploration of the phenomenon of resilience with a small sample of resilient adolescent girls who have multiple at-risk characteristics yielded heuristic possibilities for readers interested in discovering aspects about resilience that may generate awareness and action. Themes emerging from this study consisted of actions and conditions that facilitated resiliency among the adolescent girls in this sample, as well as, parent and teacher actions that fostered resilience. Actions and conditions were identified and analyzed. Finally, the need for more research that explores the interplay among multiple risks and factors that foster resiliency on three or more levels—such as students, families, and the larger social contexts of schools and communities—was emphasized.
Dedicated to my grandmothers:

Amada Garza Lopez †

&

Maria del Pilar De Los Santos Hinojosa
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: BEGINNINGS

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time

T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding (1942) pt. 5

I'm a twin. And I enjoy drama. I live for drama and dance . . . . I'm a perky person. And what else can I say about myself? I really don't have any enemies.

Mary

I'm very outgoing and open-minded. I work a lot. I'm nice and helpful too.

Rachel

I'm the kind of person that—like if they put us in a group to work together, I want to do everything because I want everything to get done right. I don't care how much time I need to spend; I don't care how much money I need to spend; but I'm the type of person that's like a perfectionist.

Lupita

I guess I'm good to get along with.

Annabel

I'm weird. A lot of people say I'm weird because I'm like... I don't really care what people think or whatever. I usually just try to make them laugh. I make them feel good about themselves. And happy and stuff.

Jaisa

I'm just all mean. I look all mean. But only when I have to be. If somebody messes with me, I'm gonna be mean. But otherwise, people are always laughing at me and stuff. I dress all bad, all gangster. I look all mean, but I'm real funny. I think I'm real nice. Unless, somebody makes me mad.

Skye
Journal Entry: 1/1/97

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!! My new year's resolution is to get some writing started on this dissertation today! I am completely overwhelmed. I mean, it's hard to decide what to do first. How does one introduce a dissertation anyway? Where do I begin? Whose voice should be heard first? There are so many! How do I try to cohesively and straightforwardly introduce the messiest and completely crazy process constituting a major part of my life for the past one and a half years? I am at a loss. I know I need to just take the plunge, but it's so hard. I think my problem is I want to be able to take the "right" stab at it and then (hopefully) it will just pour out of me from there— all of it, the girls, the parents, the questions, the issues, the themes, the teachers— but somehow, I've got to frame all of this in a way that is comprehensible and understandable and interesting. I will do it because I have a desire to finish this thing, yet I question whether this is possible. To complicate things, I have syllabi to create, books to read for next semester, students to meet with, advise, and teach. Who cares about that anyway when I have a dissertation to write? I do. I care so much about being everything everyone expects me to be. My house is a mess, I'm in my pajamas, I'm stressed out already. I must organize my life. But where to begin?

Begin at the beginning. Sounds simple enough, but it is not. For beginning something implies developing a middle, and this, of course, requires ending something that does not feel finished at all (and I suspect never will). Yet, I must try to capture the last year and a half or so of my life— a time where I was allowed to become a significant part of the lives of six teenage girls whose voices I have introduced— their responses to my first interview question.

As a researcher, I expected to be fascinated, troubled, delighted, intrigued, frustrated, and overwhelmed with my fieldwork. But what I could not expect to experience was the amazing sense of genuine affection, trust, and caring that developed between my case study participants and myself. I met with "my girls" individually in their homes, most of the times without parents present, and conducted conversational guided interviews over the course of one year. I observed these young women in their English classrooms, at football games, on field trips, at school plays, at the library as they conducted research, in the
crowded hallways of Amistad City High School as they walked and talked and laughed with friends and waved at me saying, "Hi Miss! Are you coming to see me today?" I interviewed their parents in their homes, workplaces, and restaurants, interviewed their teachers during conference periods in teachers' lounges and classrooms, and talked to their counselors, principals, and vice principals. I kept track of changing course schedules, disciplinary actions, and extracurricular activities. I provided them with support, guidance, and friendship. They let me become part of their lives and gave me so much more.

This dissertation, the last of the requirements for my Ph.D., does not seem like a final exhibition of educational scholarship prepared for a group of experts for the purpose of discussion and analysis. At least not at this point. As I reflect on the past year and a half and I look at the data (printed and placed in piles on the carpet in my study), I can almost hear the voices that resonate with emotion and self-reflection that are documented in those pages and pages of word-processed paper. I look at the books that are stacked all around my desk, my shelves, and the four corners of my study, and I see forty-six audiotapes stored in my file cabinet. And I cannot believe that I transcribed every single one—revisiting conversations with real people that allowed me to ask questions about themselves and about the ways the young women in this study manage everyday living in school, at home, at work, and with friends.

This dissertation is more than just a book-length research project (although readers, rest assured, it does include the traditional literature review, methods, and research findings chapters). This piece is a collection of stories about several teenage girls, and me, as we collectively struggled to cope with life events that tested our commitments to school success over the course of almost two years.
Background of the Problem: Autobiographical Origins

Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin (1992) describe the act of researching as "autobiographical in that some aspect of yourself is mirrored in the work you choose to pursue" (178). In their book, Peshkin discusses how his "subjectivities" operated in his research inquiry, particularly how his questions derived from his life history. He says the roots of his research focus are found in his biography, claiming, "If I know you well, I can't predict what you will study and how, but I am able to understand why you have made the decisions you have made" (103). In short, Peshkin concludes that reflecting on our research questions leads us to "greater understanding of our core values and beliefs" (178).

Like Alan Peshkin, my research interests emerged from my own life story, particularly from the intersections of my subject positions as a Mexican American woman, a lifelong "successful" student, and a high school teacher. As a Mexican American woman once raised in a predominately Mexican American rural community less than a half hour's drive from the Texas-Mexico International Bridge, I have always been aware of the power of borders—how they identify, objectify, and separate people physically, geographically, socially, economically, and psychologically. Gloria Anzaldua (1987), who also originates from this region in Texas, says the border is "set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them." She adds, "the borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary... It is in the constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (p. 3).

I am one of the prohibited and forbidden Anzaldua describes because I am an American of Mexican descent who resides in this borderland. In this region, I have acquired Spanish (the language of family) and English (the language of school and the language of power); I have experienced academic success all of
my life; and most importantly, I have learned to code-switch linguistically, culturally, and socially for survival in everyday living. I have become accustomed to the tensions and struggles of constant identity adaptations. As a woman of Mexican descent, I position myself as a "new mestiza" which Anzaldua describes in what follows:

La mestiza constantly has to shift in and out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.

The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 79).

My new mestiza subject position seems to have always been a part of me, and it is vital to my subject position of successful student. This is where the interests of my subject positions as Mexican American woman and successful student intersect. As a new mestiza, I have developed a "tolerance for contradictions" and a "tolerance for ambiguity" (p. 79) in order to survive academically. I have learned to live with cultural biases that undergird both the "formal" (i.e., legitimate) and "informal" (i.e., hidden) curricula and structures of the schools I have attended—where European, white, male, middle-class values and conceptual styles of learning are deeply embedded and valued. Codeswitching is like breathing to me. It is automatic, subconscious, and essential for survival— a natural function.
What did I do to get here?

From time to time in my life, I ask myself this question. Anzaldua's description of the new mestiza helps to explain part of the answer. I have learned to "sustain contradictions" and I have turned my "ambivalence into something else" (79). As I reflect on all of this, I realize I developed a new mestiza consciousness in my struggle to reach my goals; that is, to succeed as a woman, daughter, student, wife, and teacher. But I also recognize that no one explicitly taught me how to survive in school. As Audre Lorde (1979) poignantly states, "survival is not an academic skill . . . . It is learning how to take our differences and making them strengths" (p. 99).

I believe I acquired academic survival skills subconsciously. In school, I listened to testimonies from my teachers about their struggles for academic success and aspirations for a better quality of life for themselves and their families. At home, I observed the world in which I lived and I listened to the stories of my grandmothers, grandfathers, and of my parents—stories with themes of surviving incredible hardships through laborious work in a racist world, stories where educational opportunities were "no más para los ricos" ("only for the rich"). Another constant theme tying these stories together was the unyielding faith of my people who knew that "un día la vida será mejor para nosotros" ("one day, life will be better for us") and their children "no van a trabajar afuera en el sol, pero en una oficina" ("will not work outside in the sun, but in an office"). Working indoors in a cool air-conditioned office was symbolic of having "made it" in life. This picture of success continues to surface in my parents' and grandparents' conversations with friends or relatives: "Sí, Verónica enseña en la universidad. ¿Supiste que tiene su oficina?" ("Yes, Verónica teaches at the university. Did you know she has her own office?").
As a former secondary Language Arts teacher in the lower Rio Grande Valley, I taught students with characteristics that are identified as risks for failure. My students were ninth graders in an overpopulated District 5A school where they had been identified "at-risk." Most of them were poor or lower-middle class. Many had two parents who were seasonally employed. In fact, about 40% were migrants who trickled in little by little in September and October and moved "up north" in March and April to work as field laborers with their parents. Most had limited English proficiency and had anywhere from 3rd to 8th grade reading levels in English. Some of my students lived in single parent households and a few lived with extended family members such as grandparents or aunts and uncles. About 15% were diagnosed with learning disabilities, such as attention deficit disorder, dyslexia and hyperactivity, and were repeating their freshmen year. Many (mostly males) had records of truancy, disruptive behavior, and violence, and were considered "discipline problems." These particular students were, more often than not, members of neighborhood gangs. Some had criminal records and were periodically assigned to juvenile detention centers, bused to alternative schools for students with behavioral problems, or sent to boot camps. By the end of each year, an average of five girls in my classes were pregnant, or dropped out of school because they had given birth. Some of them got married and ended up living with their parents or in-laws, who were also poor, and had little, if any, formal education.

All of my students came into my class knowing they were "basic" students -- a label that stigmatized them as dumb, stupid, or slow. Many had the attitude that they were just "doing their time" until they were of legal age to drop out of school. The ethos in my classroom during those early days of my teaching career was thick with apathy, low self-esteem, and resistance to learning. This is where
the interests of my three subject positions—Mexican American woman, successful student, and teacher—intersect.

As a novice teacher, I realized rather quickly that my students' educational backgrounds contained borders of the most insidious nature because they were borders created by the school's structure, curriculum, and programs. These borders made them feel at-risk and disadvantaged at school; yet, they disappeared when my students were with their peers or their families, where they assumed important leadership roles and familial responsibilities.

My students were different from their peers in higher ability classes because they did not juggle cultures in ways that would enable them to experience school success, nor did they seem to develop a tolerance for contradictions. By the time these students entered elementary school, my hunch is they knew about these invisible walls that kept them out of enriching, positive, environments, where learning was student-centered, challenging, and fun. Even if they could not articulate this experience at the time, I believe their early perceptions of schooling may have set the tone for the rest of their years in public schooling, and, in part, may have laid the groundwork for their histories of low academic achievement and poor self-concepts.

I believe this is possible because I have experienced the sick, empty feeling resulting from low teacher expectations and attitudes. I can trace it back to when I was as young as five years old and in kindergarten, and already placed in a lower ability group. It did not take me long to realize the children I grew up with in my small town, and who were in the "A" kindergarten class, were the children who were deemed more likely to succeed in school. Until some of them refused to let me play with them in the playground during recess, I didn't even know I was in the "B" section. But I'll never forget the day that a little girl (whom I had practically been raised with) clued me in on the differences between being
an "A" student and a "B" student: "The 'A' class is for the smart ones and the 'B' class is for the dummies," she said in her childlike voice and diction, "Didn't you know that Verónica?"

I also recall my teachers' amazement when, on the first days of school, they discovered I could count aloud from 1 to 100, recite the alphabet in English and Spanish, and write these numbers and letters on the board. By first grade (when I was moved up to the "A" section), I noticed that all the students in my kindergarten class were children with working class parents who had little or no education, low socioeconomic status, and limited English proficiency—like my own parents. This was apparent to me at six years old in a less sophisticated way, of course, as I could never actually express this thought aloud. But I could easily recognize the class differences and the differences in teacher expectations among the two groups. I realize now that despite the fact that our small rural community was almost 100% Mexican American, there were other ways that borders continued to segregate, objectify, and label people. In retrospect, I recall being the only child transferred to the "A" first grade section the following year, and I no longer played with my kindergarten friends after being placed in this higher ability group.

School Failure: Why are Mexican American students most likely to fail?

Over the past few years, I have discovered that the problem of school failure among Hispanic youths, particularly among Mexican American students, has been widely documented in educational research (Ogbu, 1987, 1991; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, 1987; The State of America's Children, 1991; De la Rosa & Maw, 1990). A question addressed in much of this research is: Why are Mexican American students more apt to fail than White, Black, other Hispanic subgroups, or non-White American students? Although researchers do not have
an absolute answer to this question, they typically agree that at-risk factors are commonly associated with school attrition rates. These risk factors frequently pertain to family socioeconomic status and other aspects of family background. Examples include race/ethnicity, living in a poor household or single parent family, low parental education or income, and being home alone without an adult for a substantial period of time on weekdays (De la Rosa & Maw, 1990). In addition, statistics reveal that regardless of the measure used, Hispanics continue to have the highest school dropout rates of any major group. The following statistics are from a 1990 report on the state of Hispanic education in the U.S.:

Among 18-24 year olds, just 55% of Hispanics have completed high school, compared to 75% of Blacks and 82% of Whites. . . . Of all Hispanic subgroups, Mexican Americans have the lowest levels of educational attainment, and Cubans, the highest. Only 50% of the young adult Mexican American population has completed four or more years of high school, compared to 70% of Central and South Americans, 76% of Puerto Ricans, 84% of Cubans, and 77% of Other Hispanics (De la Rosa & Maw, 1990).

According to the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study (1988, cited in De la Rosa & Maw, 1990), Hispanic eighth graders are two and one-half times as likely as Whites, and slightly more than Blacks, to have two or more risk factors. Among Hispanic subgroups, Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans are most likely to have two or more risk factors, and Cubans are least likely (p. 32). The NELS (1988) report also indicates that two combinations are considered particularly important: single parent plus low income and low parental education plus limited English proficiency (p. 33). Schools with large populations of Mexican American students, such as my research site, have high percentages of students who have been labeled at-risk because they are affected by these very factors.
Levin (1989) describes at-risk students as "those who lack the home and community resources to benefit from conventional schooling practices" (47). Comer (1987) uses the term high risk to describe students who underachieve in school and will consequently underachieve as adults (cited in Waxman, 1992). According to the Institute for At-Risk Infants, Children, and Youth and Their Families (1991), the fundamental focus of the at-risk crisis are "students who leave school at any age without academic, social and/or vocational skills necessary to lead a productive and fulfilled life" (cited in Barr and Parrett, 1995, p. 12). But perhaps the most familiar perception of at-risk students is described by R.E. Slavin (1989) who simply identifies these children and teenagers as students who, on the basis of several factors, are unlikely to graduate from high school. Hispanic students (63% of Mexican heritage) have the highest incidence of a single risk factor of all groups and are almost three times more likely than White students to have two or more risk factors (De la Rosa & Maw, 1990). In concentrated areas of the United States, where immigration has intensified growth of already highly populated Mexican American geographic regions, the majority of students of Mexican descent have combined risk factors of the most serious types such as poverty, limited English proficiency, single-parent households, parents with little or no education, and migrant status.

Identification of risk factors, or potential risk factors, is necessary in order to connect students with services or support. However, identifying at-risk youth and labeling them (for instance, LD for learning disabled, LEP for limited English proficient, ADD for attention deficit disorder, hyperactive, culturally disadvantaged, basic, and so forth) frequently contributes to students becoming at-risk. Barr and Parrett (1995) maintain that labeling students often serves as a "self-fulfilling prophecy, i.e., to label a student as 'learning disabled' and to treat the student as learning disabled often leads to a youth with serious learning
In fact, these researchers say, very successful programs do not attempt to identify at-risk youth and "schools should develop effective programs, provide all students the opportunity to participate in the programs, and ensure that they all learn" (pp. 15-16). Of course, experienced educators know labeling a child or adolescent can affect him or her during school years, and can even carry over into adult life. As Manning and Baruth (1995) claim:

[A] child or adolescent categorized as a behavior problem can carry the label for years, regardless of whether learning difficulties have been overcome or if behavior has changed from negative to positive. Labeling a student at-risk can have far-reaching consequences for future educational achievement and behavior patterns. (p. 9).

Statement of the Problem

In this document, I address the ways a small group of Mexican American adolescent girls cope with conditions in their lives that are beyond their control and are commonly regarded as at-risk indicators for academic failure. In particular, I attempt to discover the following: the role school plays in their lives; the ways in which they view themselves and their places in the world; the extent to which they perceive their self-concepts as related to school success; the extent to which their social statuses at school, home identities, and peer relations shape their self-concepts; and finally, the ways they cope with adverse events and conditions that seem to make them invulnerable to academic failure.

Significance and Rationale

It is a fact today that schools have a propensity for labeling poor and minority students at-risk and assigning them to lower track or general track classes (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Kozol, 1991; Oake, 1985; O'Neil, 1992; Gamoran, 1992; and others). Also true is that students of Mexican descent are often prime
candidates for failure, in part because of the stigmas attached to these labels.

However, this study is different from most because I focus on students that have identified themselves as experiencing multiple at-risk conditions, who have a history of high academic achievement, and who are currently performing at high levels, despite adverse conditions that create obstacles to school learning. These students have been placed in different ability groups and tracks by their school administrators and counselors based on several factors such as previous academic performance or grades, norm and criterion referenced test scores, and language proficiency. The labels that describe their intellectual status consist of "Regular," "Advanced," "Honors", and "GT" (or gifted and talented).

I began this study with the broad intention of examining ways in which Mexican American students with multiple at-risk characteristics manage to achieve academic success. I wanted to see how they coped with situations that were beyond their control and to listen to their perspectives about themselves during adolescence, a critical period in their lives characterized by constant identity construction. I wanted to observe identity strategies for learning and living and to see how they are formed inside and outside of schools. I wanted to place emphasis on several students' perceptions of themselves and their struggles for success that might generate greater awareness about "at-riskness" and offer ideas, directions, and implications for teachers of students who consistently do poorly in school. And finally, I looked forward to what I could discover in their stories that might contribute to theory and practice devoted to preventing rising numbers of Mexican American students from leaving school.

A Qualitative Research Inquiry

Given the nature of my inquiry requires interaction with the people I want to learn about, qualitative research offers appropriate methods that will
generate possible answers to my questions. Qualitative research has no standard approach (Patton, 1990; Bogdan & Biklin, 1992; Lancy, 1993; Silverman, 1993); it is basically a type of research inquiry which has evolved from many research traditions such as ethnography, cognitive anthropology, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, heuristic inquiry, hermeneutics, and others. Michael Patton (1990) explains there is variety in qualitative research, yet a shared commitment to naturally occurring data. In contrast to Lincoln & Guba's (1985) contention that qualitative and quantitative approaches are entirely incompatible, Patton (1990) argues both methods can be used in a given research study, hence taking into account the flexibility that is inherent in a qualitative research design. As Patton says, "a qualitative design unfolds as fieldwork unfolds" (p. 61). In addition, he maintains, in practice, qualitative and quantitative approaches are often combined:

Some evaluation questions are determined deductively while others are left sufficiently open to permit inductive analysis based on direct observations. While the quantitative-experimental approach is largely hypothetical-deductive and the qualitative-naturalistic approach is largely inductive, an evaluation can include elements of both strategies. Indeed, there is often a flow from inductive approaches, to find out what the important questions and variables are (exploratory work), to deductive hypothesis testing aimed at confirming exploratory findings, then back again to inductive analysis to look for rival hypotheses and unanticipated or unmeasured factors. (p. 46)

Another qualitative theme is its evolutionary quality: its prespecified intent, problem statement, design, interview questions, and interpretations develop and change during fieldwork. The qualitative approach "reminds the 'scientific sociologist' [and the rest of us] that for all his or her neat abstractions, concrete human beings may not neatly bend before them" (Plummer, 1983, p. 7) [cited in Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 7]. Qualitative researchers avoid "simplifying
social phenomena"; instead, they attempt to "explore a range of behavior and expand their understanding of the resulting interactions" (p. 7).

Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) identification of "face-to-face interactions" as the predominant distinctive feature of qualitative research (p. xi) is also significant because qualitative researchers must "deal with multiple, socially constructed realities or 'qualities' that are complex and indivisible into discrete variables, [and] they [must] regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (p. 6). To uncover some of that complexity, I immersed myself in the research setting and in the lives of my research participants as I used multiple methods of data collection to document stories about them at a pivotal point in their young lives. I will discuss my research design, methods, and procedures in Chapter 3.

Theoretical Considerations

Pragmatism

Michael Patton (1990) explains there is variety in qualitative inquiry in paradigms, strategies, themes, theoretical traditions and orientations; however, "rather than believing that one must choose to align with one paradigm or another, [he] advocate[s] a paradigm of choices . . . that rejects methodological orthodoxy in favor of methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality" (p. 39). Patton's paradigm of choices recognizes "different methods are appropriate for different situations" and "situational responsiveness means designing a study that is appropriate for a specific inquiry situation" (p. 39).

Patton's pragmatic paradigm is the only viable paradigm to undergird this study because it is both practical and inclusive, and because the purpose of my study is largely heuristic. Hence, this dissertation will generate as many
interpretations as there are readers, and all of those interpretations will be filtered through theoretical orientations (such as feminism, postmodernism, symbolic interactionism, poststructuralism, etc.) and/or experiences (e.g., cognitive schema, constructions of subjectivity) that are different from mine.

Patton states "[t]he extent to which a particular study is orientational is a matter of degree" (p. 87). For example, "ethnographic studies can be viewed as orientational to the extent that they presume the centrality of culture in explaining human experience" (p. 87). This study is orientational insofar as it draws on three theoretical traditions including ethnography, phenomenology, and heuristic inquiry which I discuss briefly in what follows.

**Ethnography**

James Spradley defines culture as "the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior" (1980, p. 6). Ray P. McDermott (1976) believes that "at its best, an ethnography should account for the behavior of people in describing what it is that they know that enables them to behave appropriately given the dictates of common sense in their community" (p. 159). Clifford Geertz (1973) maintains that culture "is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly— that is thickly— described" (p. 14). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) contend "ethnography, then, is 'thick description'" (p. 39). When culture is examined from this perspective, the ethnographer becomes concerned with representations:

When culture is examined from this perspective [thick description], the ethnographer is faced with a series of interpretations of life, commonsense understandings, that are complex and difficult to separate from each other. The ethnographer's goals are to share in the meanings that the cultural participants take for granted and then to depict the new
understanding for the reader and the outsiders. The ethnographer is concerned with representations. (p. 39)

The Mexican American people in the lower Rio Grande Valley make up a distinct culture of which I am proud to be a part. Coming into this study, I assumed my research participants' perspectives, speech, and behavior at home and at school have been shaped by being a member of this cultural group. I believe it is important to describe the setting because it is the backdrop from which my interpretations of my participants' thoughts, speech, and behaviors can be examined contextually. Although I realize it is not possible to get at the true interpretation of the phenomena I am researching, I recognize that coming to know the shared meanings my research participants take for granted will enable me to get as close to right as I possibly can. In Chapter 3, I discuss my roles as an ethnographic fieldworker, researcher-as-instrument, and being an Insider-Outsider researcher (Baca Zinn, 1979).

**Phenomenology**

The research questions I have posed have phenomenological underpinnings to the extent that they inquire about subjective aspects of people's behavior. In particular, the questions I have regarding how my research participants' self-concepts are shaped by their social statuses at school, their identities at home, and their roles with peers, are questions that attempt to "gain entry into the conceptual world of [my] subjects in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 34). Michael Patton's (1990) look at phenomenological inquiry focuses on the following question:
What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people? The phenomenon being experienced may be an emotion—loneliness, jealousy, anger. The phenomenon may be a program, an organization, or a culture. (p. 59)

Phenomenology was first developed by Edmund H. Husserl (1859-1938), a German philosopher who meant to study how people describe things and experience through their senses (Patton, 1990). Drawing from Husserl, Patton asserts the most basic philosophical assumption in phenomenology is that "we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness" (p. 69):

Phenomenologists focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world and, in doing so, develop a worldview. There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means. The subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and a person's reality. (p. 69)

This research study is not a purely phenomenological study because I am not assuming there is an essence to being a successful Mexican American student. I am, however, "employing a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience" (Patton, 1990, p. 71). My mindset as a researcher is best described by David Lancy (1993) in his description of a phenomenological researcher who "tries to go out into the field with an open mind, to carry out investigations in which the conclusions are post hoc rather than a priori" (p. 9). In addition, Lancy captures my phenomenological approach to this study in his comparison of the phenomenological researcher to a natural historian who

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"observes, records, classifies, and concludes, seeking wherever possible, to capture the reality of the subjects and not only her or his own reality" (p. 9).

**Heuristic Inquiry**

In their important collaborative piece entitled, "Heuristic Inquiry: The Internal Search to Know," Douglas and Moustakas (1984) say "heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behavior" (p. 42). In search for meaning, heuristic inquirers are discoverers who follow their hunches in their quest to come to know the phenomenon in question. Heuristic research is filled with personal insights and reflections. Patton (1990) asserts "the uniqueness of heuristic inquiry is the extent to which it legitimizes and places at the fore these personal experiences, reflections, and insights of the researcher" (p. 72). He elaborates on this in the following:

The researcher, then, comes to understand the essence of the phenomenon through shared reflection and inquiry with co-researchers as they also intensively experience and reflect on the phenomenon in question. A sense of connectedness develops between researcher and research participants in their mutual efforts to elucidate the nature, meaning, and essence of a significant human experience. (p. 72)

My research inquiry process is heuristic insofar as the qualitative methods I employed (including participant observation, interviews, document analyses, and questionnaires) over the course of one and one half years, has been the most demanding, rigorous, creative, and rewarding enterprise I have ever encountered. In other words, in my desire to come to know what the young women in my study perceive, say, and do in order to do well in school, given difficult obstacles that are beyond their control, they have shared in the research effort and discovered some things about themselves that they, perhaps, wouldn't
have thought about had this study never started. In fact, Douglas and Moustakas's (1984) distinction between phenomenology and heuristics reveals this study is more closely linked to heuristic inquiry than phenomenology:

Whereas phenomenology loses the persons in the process of descriptive analysis, in heuristics the research participants remain visible in the examination of the data and continue to be portrayed as whole persons. Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience. (p. 43)

In Chapter 5 through 7, in the case studies of the girls, I try to capture their essences as particular people in real contexts at given points in time by displaying their stories entirely in their own words in the form of profiles. These are based on interview data and are crafted in the order in which they came in the interviews.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:
ON PATHOLOGY, PROMISE, AND POTENTIAL

The Discourse of Risk

The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur— others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. . . . America's position in the world may have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer. (A Nation At Risk, 1983, p. 5-6).

Since the National Commission on Excellence in Education described the state of American public schooling as a national crisis, use of the term at-risk has become "part of our national vocabulary" (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Arguing that Americans have "[lost] sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectation and disciplined effort needed to attain them" (p. 5), and "others" have begun to surpass us educationally, the commission urges educators to use "the tools at hand" (i.e., the New Basics) to repair the at-risk problem.

The report states "over half of the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school" and "both the number and proportion of students demonstrating superior achievement of the SAT's (i.e., those with scores of 650 or higher) have also dramatically declined" (p. 8). Despite apparent indications that students considered at-risk in the report
are those placed in college prep courses, the majority of risk research generated since this report does not focus on this particular group of students. In short, when people think of at-risk students, the so-called "college bound" rarely come to mind. Minority children with low socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, from single-parent households, however, do.

Robert D. Barr and William H. Barrett (1995) review several funded 1980s studies in their book, *Hope At Last For At-Risk Youth*. They describe the "at-risk crisis" in the following:

The crisis is the undereducation of a segment of our students presently constituting one out of three students in today's classrooms. Dominant in this group are the children of poverty—those impacted by economic and cultural disadvantage. They have come to be called youth 'at-risk' because they are at risk of emerging from school underprepared for further education or the kinds of jobs available. Often they are only ready for lives of alienation and dependency. (p. 11)

Many risk researchers emphasize identification of "at-risk factors" as a way of "determining the nature and degree of risk evident among young people in school" (Frymier, 1992). In a revision of his 1989 Phi Delta Kappa national study of at-risk students co-authored with Bruce Gansneder, and many others, Jack Frymier found that of the 45 risk factors identified in a sample of 21,000 students, several were related, and could be collapsed. The result—35 risk factors falling into five broad problem categories including personal pain, academic failure, socioeconomic situation of the family, family instability, and family budgeting (pp. 9-10). Significantly, Frymier discovered that youth who were at risk because of one factor tended to be at risk as a result of others as well:

Children who hurt, hurt all over. Children who fail, often fail in everything they do. Risk is pervasive. If a student is at risk in one area, that student is very likely to be at risk in many other areas, thus efforts to help may be confounded because other problems are involved. (p. 5)
Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989) also stress the interrelation of risk factors in their collaborative research article about disadvantaged youth. They list five key indicators that place students at risk of academic failure which include minority, racial, or ethnic group identity, living in a poverty household, living in a single-parent family, having a poorly educated mother, and having a non-English language background (p. 4).

Henry Slavin and Nancy Madden (1989) identify low achievement, grade retention, behavioral problems, poor attendance, low socioeconomic status, and attendance at schools with large numbers of poor students as factors that are "closely associated with the dropout rate; by the time students are in the third grade, we can use these factors to predict with remarkable accuracy which students will drop out of school, and which will stay to complete their education" (p. 4).

In Michelle Fine's (1986) important ethnographic study about high school dropouts in inner-city Philadelphia, participants listed five "causes" for their decisions to leave school. They include: placing a low value of a high school diploma, having family, economic, and social obligations that take priority over school, having an undermined sense of self-esteem, being pushed out of school due to absentee policies, and getting pregnant.

Most risk researchers contend that identification of at-risk students is imperative in our collective struggle as educators to foster success for all our students. Recognizing that "[a]ll children and adolescents are at risk at some time"; that "[a]t-risk conditions affect children and adolescents in different ways and might not affect some children and adolescents at all"; and that "[e]ducators must use great caution when determining who is and who is not at risk" (p. 7), Manning and Baruth (1995) see the recent trend of school recognition of at-risk
students as an indication of a brighter future. They maintain "the number of at-risk programs and efforts in operation today provide a clear indication that educators' recognition is a step toward genuine commitment" (p. 320). Moreover, they attribute the current emphasis on prevention as another positive step in the right direction, listing "early diagnosis of learning problems, substance abuse programs beginning in the elementary grades, developmentally appropriate sex education for elementary-age children, and detailed instruments to spot potential school dropouts" (p. 320) as examples. Furthermore, the researchers cite two positive effects that the current shift of emphasis to prevention, rather than remediation, has for educators:

First, educators may be able to identify at-risk symptoms before conditions grow more serious so that programs can be directed toward addressing individual at-risk needs. Second, efforts directed toward identifying problems and conditions may have the potential for preventing problems. Likewise, the extra time provided learners, questions about individual needs, working with parents, and coordination of professional's efforts all can show children and adolescents that educators are concerned with the learner's present and future welfare. . . . Educators working to prevent at-risk conditions may, consciously or unconsciously, offer a statement or convey a nonverbal message that may have a long-lasting and positive effect on learners. (p. 321)

However compelling in theory, research reveals even though most educators accept and prefer prevention and intervention programs (such as dropout prevention programs and alternative schools) to remediation programs, most funded programs for at-risk students emphasize remediation (Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, 1992). In light of this, Manning and Baruth (1995) observe that at-risk programs, which include compensatory programs and programs addressing specific conditions, often neglect to consider adverse effects they may have on students' self-concepts. For instance, having been identified a LEP (limited English proficient) student who gets "pulled out" of class for a certain
period of time everyday for supplemental content area instruction may produce a poor self-concept, as can being identified a Chapter I student who is told to stand in a separate "free lunch" line.

Similarly, Reynolds, Wang & Walberg (1995) assert "the use of labels for students (such as mildly mentally retarded, Chapter 1, learning disabled, and emotionally disturbed) should be discontinued" and educators ought to shift labels from students to programs. Furthermore, they recommend "changing special funding systems, which now frequently encourage a 'bounty hunt' mentality, to one that pays off on programmatic units" and that "schools, such as those that enroll large numbers of low-achieving students from poor families or students facing the second language learning challenge" receive more money and resources (p. 191).

Given these alternatives, other risk researchers claim "school conditions, long thought to contribute to students' intellectual growth and overall well-being, might actually contribute to learners being at risk" (Manning & Baruth, 1995, p. 75; Slavin, 1988; Riccio, 1985). For example, ability grouping, once thought to work and to produce academic achievement, is gradually being replaced by alternative models and learning environments such as block scheduling, interdisciplinary team-teaching, and multi-age classrooms. Unfortunately, it is still the prevalent structure in schools with high populations of students living in conditions considered adverse to school learning, such as Chapter 1 schools. Other aspects of school environments that influence students' academic failure consist of schools that (a) alienate students and teachers, (b) provide low standards and a low quality of education, (c) have differential expectations for students, (d) have high noncompletion rates for students, (e) are unresponsive to students, (f) have high truancy and disciplinary problems, or (g)

According to H. Prentice Baptiste Jr., (1992) "the schools are failing these children" (p. 12). Students are disadvantaged because schools are not meeting their specific educational needs, and students are at risk because they are unable to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them (p. 12). Baptiste maintains "the classroom environment must be one that is non-threatening to the students, and the interactions between student and teacher and teacher and student should be based on respect" (p. 13). Large schools, particularly those with poor and minority enrollments, tend to alienate students. Teachers have very little contact with students, and students are less likely to become a part of the school's community. Hence school size may have an effect on school attrition rates as well (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, cited in Waxman, et al., 1992, p. 13).

The Discourse of Promise

Recently, at-risk research has been criticized by educational researchers for a variety of reasons. In their book, Children and Families at Promise: Deconstructing the Discourse of Risk (1995), Beth Blue Swadener and Sally Lubeck edited a collection of related articles that deconstruct the generalized use of the at-risk label, which is "highly problematic and implicitly racist, classist, sexist, and ableist, a 1990's version of the cultural deficit model which locates problems or 'pathologies' in individuals, families, and communities rather than in institutional structures that create and maintain inequality" (p. 3). Moreover, they find:

This deficit model discourse typically gets framed as private and personal, often taking the form of blaming the victim—particularly in a
nation whose dominant culture perpetuates the myth of meritocracy, in which privileges are assumed to be earned or deserved, a nation which systemically denies or attempts to ignore the pervasive exclusionary and oppressive practices in society. (p. 2)

Almost two decades have passed since Brofenbrenner (1979) criticized the deficit model of public policy. He argued it was the individual child, his or her family, or his or her ethnic group that is deficient in the public's common perspective of social and educational problems, and this model focused on the individual, not the circumstances that produce the problem (cited in Waxman, Walker de Felix, Anderson, & Baptiste, Jr., 1992, p. 3). Rather than trying to prevent problem circumstances, from this model, the public focuses on specific programs for these "problem children" instead. Because the model assumes a deficiency, the solution is determining the problem and then trying to correct it (p. 3).

Unlike Frymier's (1992) claims, apparent in the title of his Phi Delta Kappa study, Growing Up is Risky Business, and Schools are Not to Blame, Hersholt Waxman contends schools are, indeed, to blame: "Researchers have found that the school effect is more powerful than the (a) family effect, (b) teacher effect, (c) neighborhood effect, and (d) the cultural environment that describes the community" (p. 6). Michelle Fine (1995) echoes this position in her article, "The Politics of Who's "at-Risk." She maintains the language of risk "pierc[es] daily consciousness, educational practices, and bureaucratic policy-making. Scholars, practitioners, and activists have been quick to name, identify, and ossify those who presumably suffer at the mercy of 'risk factors'" (p. 76). Ultimately, Fine concludes the notion of risk "keeps us from being broadly, radically, and structurally creative about transforming schools and social conditions for all of today's and tomorrow's youths" (p. 91).
In their qualitative, data-based research article, B. Robert Tabachnick and Marianne Bloch (1995) focus on how constructions of 'risk' and 'promise' are developed. Tracking 23 young children from three schools in a midwestern city as they entered kindergarten and moved into the first and second grades, these researchers concluded "how teachers understand, value, and use the subtle aspects of their own culture influence how they construct some children's actions as more 'at risk' of failure than 'at promise' for success" (p. 190). Hence, their study calls for a new theory, "that recognizes the range and variety of differences within groups and across gender and class, and that responds to the dynamic qualities of culture as expressed in multiple contexts" (p. 206). Valerie Polakow (1995) agrees:

When classrooms do become landscapes of promise, they offer children a place where their selfhood matters, where they can become meaningmakers within their lifeworld of school. It is important to read about struggles that lead to empowerment and to successful advocacy, for resilient voices are critical to hear within the at-risk wasteland. (p. 269)

The discourse of promise is also used frequently in books and educational journals devoted to literacy issues. These are written by researchers and educators with whole language perspectives (Goodman, 1986; Edelsky, Alwerger, & Flores (1991); Vacca & Rasinski, 1992), multicultural and social reconstructionist approaches (Grant & Gomez, 1996), and authentic assessment advocates who write about portfolio assessment, reading and writing workshops, and work-required assessment (see Atwell, 1987; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

The Discourse of Resilience
Over the years, a growing body of research suggests a significant number of children and adolescents touched by adversity fare reasonably well despite overwhelming obstacles. This corpus consists mostly of longitudinal studies challenging the notion that "stress and risk (including abuse, loss and neglect, or simply the ordinary stresses of life) inevitably doom people to develop psychopathology or perpetuate cycles of poverty, abuse, educational failure, or violence" (Henderson & Milstein, 1996, p. 2).

The current shift of attention from a "pathology-based medical model of human development to a proactive wellness-based model" (Henderson & Milstein, 1996, p. 3) stems from "risk" and "survivor" studies; that is, studies about "children of schizophrenics, homeless and poor children, survivors of the Holocaust, women raised in orphanages, and adults raised during the Depression just to name a few" (Viadero, 1991). They emerge from the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and sociology; however, researchers in education, particularly those interested in at-risk issues, have also made significant scholarly contributions to this interdisciplinary field currently known as "resilience research" (Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Bernard, 1991, 1993; Richardson, Neiger, Jensen & Kumpfer, 1990).

Given that resilience research aims to understand how children and adolescents cope, buffer stress, or handle life events in spite of considerable, and even severe, adversity, several related terms and concepts are used in these studies, such as vulnerability, invulnerability, stress-resistant, and invincibility. It is important to note that a deconstructive or semantic analysis of each of these descriptors and/or phenomena is beyond the scope of this dissertation, for this is an ambitious project in itself. My method is this document is to simply use the terms that fit, or that make sense to me, as they evolve from analysis, making sure that I define what I mean when I use it. At this point, I borrow Emmy E.
Werner's definition of resilience as a starting point for this short review of resilience research (cited in Henderson & Milstein, 1996):

Behavioral scientists have used the term resilience to describe three kinds of phenomena: (1) positive development outcomes among children who live in "high risk" contexts, such as chronic poverty or parental substance abuse; (2) sustained competence under prolonged stress, such as the events surrounding the break-up of their parents' marriage; and (3) recovery from trauma, especially the horrors of civil wars and concentration camps. (p. viii)

Historically, Bonnie Bernard (1991) traces early resilience research to the late 1950s, and into the 1960s and 1970s, as a time when researchers began to study "individuals postulated to be at high risk for developing certain disorders such as neonatal stress, poverty, neglect, abuse, physical handicaps, war, and parental schizophrenia, depression, alcoholism, and criminality" (p. 2). Bernard describes this research as mostly developmental and longitudinal, assessing children at various times during their development:

As the children studied in the various longitudinal projects grew into adolescence and adulthood, a consistent--and amazing--finding emerged: While a certain percentage of these high-risk children developed various problems, a greater percentage of the children became healthy, competent young adults. (p. 2)

Citing a few significant examples, such as Manfred Bleuler's finding that only 9% of children of schizophrenic parents become schizophrenic, while 75% develop into healthy adults, and Michael Rutter's, that "half of the children living under conditions of disadvantage do not repeat that pattern in their own adult lives" (cited in Garmezy, 1991), Bernard describes her perspective as preventionist and interventionist:
Our perspective is that personality and individual outcomes are the result of a transactional process with one's environment. To be successful, prevention interventionists must focus on enhancing and creating positive environmental contexts—families, schools, and communities that, in turn, reinforce positive behaviors. (p. 3)

Norman Garmezy (1996), professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Minnesota, discusses the origins of resiliency research in a different manner, by drawing distinctions between risk and resilience as epidemiological constructs:

Risk research has its roots in epidemiology and hence in medicine as well. It is concerned with the identification of factors that accentuate or inhibit disease and deficiency states, and the processes that underlie them. The words accentuate or inhibit are carefully chosen despite their seemingly contradictory meanings. For they point to the far-reaching range of risk research, which embraces a broad band of risk factors to which children and adults can be exposed—some may eventuate in disease or disorder (which identifies vulnerability), but others, in many instances, may be overcome and lead to positive adaptive behavior (which identifies resilience). (p. 9)

Historically, Garmezy explains, risk research has focused on identifying all types of risk factors that "traverse the entire life-span from birth to adulthood" (p. 10). Because risk research is "not the elusive concern of any one single profession; rather it embraces multiple biological and behavioral sciences," (p. 10), epidemiological studies throughout the years have focused on the following:

... potential biological and behavioral precursors; personality predispositions of both positive and negative attributes, including genetic and environmental predisposing factors; the actualizing power of stressful experiences via the ameliorating force of identifiable "protective factors"; and the study of coping patterns, including their origins and developmental and situational contexts; and the evaluation of outcomes ranging from signs of severe biobehavioral and social deficits to patterns of resilience and adaptation amid disadvantage. (pp. 9-10).
Furthermore, recent research "has been to attempt to identify so-called stress-resistant or resilient children, as reflected in signs of retained competence despite the presence of adverse circumstances in which adversity takes the form of biological, psychological, or societal shortcomings" (p. 11). But there is a danger in the "sudden popularity of the concept of resilience" (p. 13), Garmezy cautions. The following caveat is noteworthy:

Risk has its base in epidemiology; resilience has its base in drama. The drama is that of the 'American dream' the Horatio Alger legend—the mistaken view that any and all could succeed were they to work hard.

These are myths that need rejection. They are accompanied by the journalistic exercise of seeking a dramatic case from the researcher and the insistence that this will engage the readership. That is not our primary concern. The construct of resilience is potentially valid but research proof is needed to substantiate its meaning. This will require the heavy demand of short- and long-term research commitments and theoretical constructions that provide a context when opening up any area of neglected study. Only with a solid research background behind it can the construct of resilience gain legitimacy and a place in the sun. (p. 13)

Lois Murphy and Alice Moriarty's (1976) pioneering longitudinal study of "twenty-five to thirty children over an eighteen year period from early infancy to high school graduation" is a major contribution to resilience research (p. 10). Their aim, "to increase our understanding of the development of individual children as they grow up in a relatively stable community and as they confront the everyday demands and stresses typical for children in a society" was actualized as they were able to identify recurrent themes among participants (p. 3). In particular, the following two surfaced: "the vulnerability of the child in relation to pressures and stress from the environment, and the resources the child finds in himself and in the environment" (p. 11). Their idea of a "continuum of
vulnerability" and their emphasis on environmental factors is essential in resilience research today:

Along the continuum of vulnerability, children may be distributed in different numbers: few if any are so robust, so completely lacking in small as well as moderate or major handicaps as to be totally free from some zone of vulnerability. Most children have a checkerboard of strengths and weaknesses, or an 'Achilles heel,' or a cluster of tendencies that interact in such a way as to produce one or another pattern of vulnerability as well as strength. Given an infant of greater or lesser initial adequacy, decreases in vulnerability depend on outcomes of interaction between this child and its environment and the extent to which these outcomes compensate for early deficiencies or allow for progress in mastery. Increases in vulnerability are seen when the interaction between the child and the environment results in new limitations or difficulties, new threats to homeostasis and to integration, new obstacles in learning, increased difficulties in mastering anxiety, or negative expectancies. (italics mine, p. 202)

Anthony & Cohler (1987) agree with Murphy & Moriarty's concept of a continuum which "also serves to remind us of the importance of individual differences even in the same family or children and within the same twinship" xi). Significantly, they use the term invulnerability rather than resilience in the title of their book, The Invulnerable Child (1987), a collection of articles based mostly on longitudinal developmental studies of resilience in children at risk, because it seems to "make the point of psychological invincibility much more strikingly than the term resilience" (p. xi). These researchers agree with Murphy and Moriarty who say "there is no completely invulnerable child" and children are also "relatively invulnerable when the stress is meaningless within the frame of the child's phase of development, which psychoanalysts refer to as 'nonspecific trauma'" '(p. xi).

In his comprehensive introductory chapter, "Risk, Vulnerability, and Resilience: An Overview," Anthony attributes Murphy and Moriarty's concept of
a resiliency continuum, for "greater therapeutic and preventative optimism for change" (p. 29). He explains the resiliency continuum in the following:

One can look forward to shifts in vulnerability from infancy to childhood, and this progression offers important clues to possible sources of resilience or lack of it. Better coping skills begin to emerge in parallel with healthy defenses, or else the small child becomes increasingly inhibited as a measure of avoidance or a greater need for rigid control. Integration and disintegration are concomitant processes to these. (pp. 29-30)

Elsewhere, Anthony (1974) distinguishes the concepts of risk, vulnerability, and resilience using the analogy of three dolls made of glass, plastic, and steel and exposed to the same risk, the blow of a hammer.

The first doll breaks down completely, the second shows a dent that it carries permanently, and the third doll give out a fine metallic sound. Of course, the "outcome" for the three dolls should be different if their "environments" were to buffer the blows from the hammer by interposing some type of "umbrella" between the eternal attack and the recipient. Furthermore, there is another element in the analogy that is untrue to life: the risks to which children are exposed are as variable in their severity and nature as the vulnerabilities and resilientues with which the children confront them. The considerations make the prediction of outcome extremely difficult. (cited in Anthony & Cohler, 1987, pp. 10-11)

Anthony's discussion about this analogy's limitations recognizes biological, psychological, environmental, and sociological differences among, and variations within, human beings which make resiliency research difficult to interpret. In fact, Bertham Cohler (1987), Anthony's co-editor, argues that resiliency research ought to have predictive and narrative approaches and should "require consideration of the characteristics associated with particular life changes, as well as the timing of these changes in terms of the life course" (p. 364). Moreover, he maintains:
These characteristics of events must be considered together with the attributes of persons, including such innate characteristics as temperament, as well as constitutionally determined vulnerability for experiencing increased distress when confronted with particular kinds of adversity at particular points in the course of life. This predictive approach, based on information regarding the type of life change, the social context in which particular changes take place, and the attributes of persons, must be complemented by a narrative approach, which is concerned with the manner in which persons experience and interpret or "make sense" of these life changes. (pp. 384-385)

Cohler contends resiliency, like vulnerability, ought to be viewed as "relative, depending upon complex interactions between constitutional factors and life circumstances" (p. 406). Resilience appears to be a "process determined by the impact of a particular life experience among persons with particular conceptions of their own life history or personal narrative" (p. 406). Finally, Cohler's claim that "interpretive approaches complement systematic predictive approaches in understanding the determinants and course of vulnerability and resilience in the study of lives" (p. 406), emphasizes the important role of qualitative research in this field.

Emmy E. Werner's thirty-five year longitudinal study of resilient children, from "babyhood to adulthood," on the island of Kauai, initiated by Werner and co-authored with Ruth S. Smith (1982), actually adheres to Cohler's research criteria. Among the researchers' findings, they discovered the following:

A central component of effective coping with the multiplicity of inevitable life stresses appears to be a sense of coherence, a sense of confidence that one's internal and external environment is predictable and that things will probably work out as well as can reasonably be expected. (p. 163)

In light of this conclusion, Bonnie Bernard's (1991) profile of the resilient child, a compilation of attributes based on resilience research, is consistent with
Werner and Smith's emphasis on "a sense of coherence." Her research indicates the resilient child, indeed, "works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well" (Garmezy, 1974; Werner & Smith, 1982). More specifically, resilient children have the following specific attributes: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future (pp. 3-6). In addition, protective factors within the family, school, and community are imperative due to the following:

If the child's major risks lie in the family system, such as growing up in an alcoholic, abusive, or schizophrenic home, many of the factors identified as protective will derive from the school or community environments. Likewise, when the a child's major risks come from the community system—usually the condition of living in poverty as over one-fourth of the children in the United States now do—protective factor research has usually examined the role that the family and school systems play in the development of resiliency. (p. 6)

Finally, Bernard lists protective factors within the family, school, and community as "powerful predictors of the outcome of children and youth" including caring and support, high expectations, and encouragement of children's participation at home, in school, and in the larger community.

The last contribution to resilience research in this review is Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer's (1990) resiliency model. Like Bernard, these researchers view resiliency as "a process of interaction between individuals and environmental circumstances that promote resiliency in youth" (p. 33). In addition, they describe resiliency as "a process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from the event"(p. 34). This model depicts a single point in time in the life of an
individual and may be a matter of a few minutes of disruption or it may represent years of struggle. It is summed up in the following:

The premise of the model is that in order to become more resilient, an individual must pass through challenges, stressors, and risks, become disorganized, reorganize his or her life, learn from the experiences, and surface stronger with more coping skills and protective factors. Key components of the model include biopsychospiritual homostasis, life events, biopsychospiritual protective factors, interaction, disruption, disorganization, reintegration, and, for facilitators, envirosocial protective, enhancing, supportive, and reintegrative processes. (p. 35)

Adolescence

Ruby Takanishi (1993), executive director of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, says all adolescents, regardless of economic background, race and ethnicity, gender, and geographical region or country, have basic needs that must be satisfied including: experiencing secure relationships with a few human beings, being a valued member of groups that provide mutual aid and caring relationships, becoming a competent individual who can cope with the exigencies of everyday life, and believing in a promising future in work, family, and citizenship. Most importantly, she asserts, "there is no question that the development of strong, resilient young people depends on the availability of caring adults in families and in communities" (pp. 1-4).

This emphasis on adult guidance during adolescent development is echoed by David Hamburg (1993), from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, who states:

It is essential that we help young adolescents to acquire constructive knowledge and skills, inquiring habits of mind, dependable human relationships, a reliable basis of earning respect, a sense of belonging in a valued group, and a way of being useful to these communities. (p. 8)
Unfortunately, however, Hamburg reports young adolescents now have less and less opportunity for direct participation in the adult world. They are "less clear how to be useful, less clear how to earn respect in one's community. . . . [t]he requirements, risks, and opportunities of this period are now highly ambiguous for most adolescents" (p. 9). Furthermore, Hamburg contends support and guidance functions, previously provided by adults in families, are harder to come by these days; their essential role in developing healthy, resilient adolescents are becoming a thing of the past:

We are more likely than we were three decades ago to bypass marriage altogether, to live alone, to end marriage by divorce or to have revolving marriages, to have both parents work outside the home when the children are young and throughout childhood, to live in single-parent families, typically with the mother present but no adult male, and very often no other adult person. (p. 10)

In short, adolescent development researchers, who are constantly developing new ways schools and communities can build strong relationships with adolescents, share a central concern—the lack of parent involvement that pervades in families across the United States (Eccles & Harold, 1993; James Comer, 1980; Steinber & Darling, 1994).

**Affective Issues in the Classroom**

James Beane (1990) uses the developmental approach in his research concerning a related topic—*affect* in the curriculum. Beane suggests "self-perceptions are a central feature in the human personality from which flow thought and actions regarding self and others; the environment, in turn, acts in powerful ways to inform self-perceptions" (p. 72). In another work (Beane & Lipka, 1986), Beane and his co-author contend the development of social
connections is a powerful factor in self-perceptions among adolescents. They acknowledge that adolescents often experience frustration in their efforts to develop a strong sense of self due to the cultural ambiguity regarding adolescence—hence, "the dual standard that expects adult responsibility but withholds adult privileges [is often] a source of confusion" (pp. 26-27).

In terms of self-perceptions and academic achievement, Beane and Lipka (1986) cite several research studies demonstrating the general principle that academic success leads to academic self-confidence. They say "to ignore the power of that relationship is to risk offering students a continually debilitating experience. To recognize and build on the relationship offers the opportunity to enhance not only self-perceptions, but school achievement as well" (p. 57). James Raffini (1993) concurs with this position stating "individuals strive to behave in ways that are consistent with the view they hold of themselves," thus, "students who believe they cannot understand math behave in ways that reinforce this perception" (p. 14-15).

**Developmental and Psychological Affects Among Adolescent Girls**

Ann Peterson, one of the nation's leading researchers in adolescent development, has concluded that puberty is usually a positive experience for boys, and negative for girls. In her research, she found that the seventh grade girls who are most likely to say they had a poor self-image and had symptoms of depression, were girls who were academically successful. When these girls lowered their academic achievement by eighth grade, typically in stereotypical "masculine" courses like math and science, their self-image and depression improved. Ultimately, "girls sacrifice the long-term benefits of achievement on the alter of short-term popularity" (cited in Mann, 1994, p. 174).
A related finding is documented in *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (1992), an AAUW report, which reveals sharp contrasts in self-esteem from different racial and ethnic groups. Among elementary school girls, 55% of White girls, 65% of Black girls, and 68% of Hispanic girls reported being "happy as I am." But in high school, only 22% of White girls, 30% of Hispanic girls, and 58% of Black girls responded in agreement with this statement. The report indicates that patterns of declining self-esteem, negative body image, and depression begin at early adolescence and continue as girls mature. Furthermore, in high school, young women confront more conflicting expectations:

The growing inconsistencies and contradictions of female adolescence provide greater stress and fewer coping resources for girls. . . . It appears that current cohorts of girls experience stress because of conflicting demands to achieve in the public sphere and be successful in interpersonal relations, especially dating. (p. 13)

Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan (1992), researchers at the Harvard Project on the Psychology of Women and the Development of Girls, describe the "edge of adolescence as a time of heightened psychological risk for girls. Girls at this time have been observed to lose their vitality, their resilience, their immunity to depression, their sense of themselves and their character" (p. 2). In another work, Gilligan maintains the time between the ages eleven and sixteen is especially critical in girl's lives and the crisis is one of relationship (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hammer, 1990). Gilligan (1993) illuminates this thesis in the following:

Like girls in novels and poems written by women, girls interviewed in contemporary school settings speak about taking themselves out of relationships as they approach adolescence: about 'building a little shield,' about 'getting afraid to say when you're mad at somebody,' about 'losing confidence in myself. I was losing track of myself, really, and losing the kind of person I was.' Paradoxically, girls are taking themselves out of relationship for the sake of relationship and self-consciously letting go of themselves. This doubling of psychological language augments the
confusion girls experience at this time—the inability, in a way, to say what is happening, as if one psychology has been superimposed on another, causing girls to lose track of their own experience as they move into the larger world. (p. 165)

Brown and Gilligan (1992) insist we must listen to girls, for "when we meet at the crossroads of adolescence, the intergenerational seam of a patriarchal culture opens. If women and girls together resist giving up relationship for the sake of 'relationships,' then this meeting holds the potential for societal and cultural change" (p. 232).

Relevant here is Judy Mann's (1994) argument that public schools need to "pay more attention to the cultural and ethical atmosphere they are encouraging, or in some cases condoning" (p. 147). According to her research:

> [G]irls' schools provide a model of respect and caring for other members of the school community that comes out of an emphasis that girls and women put in relationships . . . By emphasizing the validity of the female valuing system and its importance to the school community, public schools can offer a counterbalance to the machismo atmosphere that prevails—and too often creates a culture of violence—in public schools. (p. 147)

A fairly recent AAUW report, Growing Smart: What's Working for Girls in School: Executive Summary and Action Guide (1995), reflects a similar concern among educators interested in gender equity issues in our public schools. The report lists five central themes that are key to creating successful programs for schools including: (1) Celebrating girls' strong identity; (2) Respecting girls as central players; (3) Connecting girls to caring adults; (4) Ensuring girls' participation and success; and (5) Empowering girls to realize their dreams (p. 1). Action strategies are available in this report for administrators, teachers, counselors, school staff, political leaders and policymakers, community youth groups, parents, and students.
Hispanic Adolescent Girls: On Gender, Culture, and School Achievement

Leobardo Estrada's (1988) description of the U.S. Southwest, the broader region where this study takes place, serves as a backdrop for this section. Describing this area of the U.S. as "a region characterized by dramatic rates of growth, economic expansion, and large ethnic enclaves" (p. 17), he reports that the majority of all U.S. Hispanics can be found in this region. Most dramatically affected by the demographic changes that occur here are schools enrolling high percentages of Hispanic students (mostly of Mexican descent), which have the lowest levels of educational achievement and literacy, and the highest of poverty (p. 17).

According to Arthur Hernandez (1995), professor at The University of Texas at San Antonio, "as a group, on average [Hispanics] complete 7.1 years of schooling, with a reported drop-out rate of 60%. Hispanic females are particularly at-risk; they have 2 to 3% lower retention rates at the secondary level than males" (p. 18). Several generally accepted contributing factors viewed as causes of these phenomena, Hernandez says, are language and cultural barriers, grades or discipline, inappropriate curriculum, insufficient role models, low expectations, lack of counseling, low socioeconomic status, and lack of educationally related resources and opportunities (p. 18).

Mari Luci Jaramillo (1985) argues that schools have failed to socialize and retain Hispanic women in this country due to the perpetuation and feminization of poverty, the continued paucity of Hispanic American women as role models and mentors for younger generations, and the perpetuation of limited and stereotypic places of women in society. Rejecting literature that profiles Hispanics in terms of high dropout rates and low performance levels, rather than low retention rates and inadequate instructional socialization practices, Jaramilla contends:
In dealing with Hispanic American females, teachers may relinquish their students; that is, pass them on to others, delegate them to pull-out programs or assign them to teacher aides. . . . They spend less time with them, they interact infrequently and less positively with them, and deny them personal attention. (p. 6)

This is a significant finding since traditional Mexican culture values personalism, or warmth, expressions of personal interest, and connectedness with others (Murrillo, 1976).

In a fairly recent issue of *Qualitative Studies in Education*, Julie Laible (1996) shares interview transcripts that show how a group of select teachers' and administrators' "knowing/understanding" the experiences of the girls in their schools promoted academic success of Mexican-American females who, traditionally, have not experienced success in school. Themes emerging from the transcripts reveal that (1), the Mexican-American girls interviewed were inspired by teachers and principals who share their life stories, particularly when these stories mirror the girls' own lives; (2) they were most impressed by teachers who had high expectations of them and demanded *respeto* (respect) in their classrooms (customary in Mexico); and (3) they often believed a college education was only possible for people who were wealthy.

Very little research has been conducted regarding Hispanic girls and academic achievement. Most of the research I have come across has either not mentioned the sex of the Hispanic sample, or not considered gender a significant variable in its study. In fact, I found only one complete study within the last ten years devoted exclusively to Hispanic females in secondary schools— Rafaela Santa Cruz and Maria Senour's (1989) study of factors in high and low achievement among Hispanic females in three San Diego City Schools. These researchers discovered both low and high achieving adolescent Hispanic girls
focused on \textit{relational/human interaction} when asked what they liked and disliked about school. In addition, they found Hispanic counselors were more likely to give Hispanic students help and encouragement to succeed than non-Hispanic counselors; low achievers felt less was expected of them in math and English classes than high achievers; most members of both groups felt they did \textit{not} have to be competitive in order to get good grades; and high achievers were more likely to be in more advanced classes where the majority of students were white.

Other findings that were particularly interesting in this study include the following: high achievers were more likely to speak Spanish \textit{both} at home and at school; low achievers tended to have less favorable results when seeking help from teachers; and low achievers came from families where there are fewer family responsibilities, less structure, less family interaction, and more personal problems, and where their parents were less likely to be involved in their education. These girls tended not to like their neighbors, were more likely to have a boyfriend, and more likely to consider marriage at an early age. Finally, high achievers were placed in classrooms "with more interaction, more opportunities to participate, a greater richness of materials, and more varied activities than those of low achievers" (pp. 59-63).

The fact that Hispanic females are more likely to leave school than Hispanic males, and Hispanics as a whole have the highest attrition rates of any ethnic or cultural group in the U.S., illuminates the drastic need for more research about this particular student population. It is my hope that my own research study will be a significant contribution to this sparse, albeit depreciated, literature.

\textbf{Learning about Adolescent Hispanic Girls in Alternative Places}
Much of what we know about issues of self-concept and experiences with schooling among Hispanic girls and adolescents, particularly those from Mexican descent, derives from Chicana poetry, realistic fiction, autobiographical prose, and critical essays. Prevalent themes running through this literature are issues related to skin color, naming, class differences, patriarchal rearing, and voice (i.e., silencing, language barriers, prejudices, and attitudes) to name a few. For instance, Ana Castillo (1994) writes about how “internalized racism” based on skin color pervades Hispanic culture:

Looking different, that is, not being white nor black but something in between in a society that has historically acknowledged only a black/white racial schism is cause for great anxiety. Our internalized racism causes us to boast of our light coloring, if indeed we have it, or imagine it. We hope for light-skinned children and brag at no end of those infants who happen to be born guëros, white-looking, we are downright ecstatic if they have light colored eyes and hair. We sometimes tragically reject those children who are dark. (p. 38)

At a very young age, children’s self-concepts are affected by how people in their environment perceive them according to their physical features; therefore, identity issues develop, complicated by gender roles, culture, and class expectations. Sandra Cisneros's literary writing contains many of these relevant cultural and gender themes that speak to the common experiences of many young female Hispanas. For example, in The House on Mango Street (1989), Esperanza, a girl on the edge of adolescence, wants to rename herself so that people could see her for "the real me"— and not just for her Spanish, hard-to-pronounce name:

At school, they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as my sister’s name—Magdalena—which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who as least can come
home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza... I would like to
baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one
nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes.
Something like Zeze the X will do. (p. 11)

Esperanza is aware that her Mexican name stirs up stereotypes and other
negative, limited perspectives of her. A more Anglicized name, one that is easier
for non-Hispanics to pronounce, like Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X, reflects
her desire to be viewed as a proud, attractive, and confident American girl.
Cisneros's profound declaration, via Esperanza's struggles with identity
formation, is particularly poignant as she reveals how names often bring about
poor self-images or self-concepts; and particularly, how children and adolescents
are affected by how pretty (i.e., Anglo American) or ugly (i.e., non-Anglo-
American) their names are.

Poverty is yet another experience among Hispanic girls and teens. In fact,
children and adolescents living in poverty in the U.S. (over half of which are
Blacks and Hispanics) are twice as likely to be retained in a grade as children of
nonpoverty-stricken families. And children who are retained in a grade are more
likely to drop out of school before graduation (Natriello, McDill, and Pallas,
1990). In her autobiographical essay entitle "La Prieta" ("The Dark One"), Gloria
Anzaldua (1983) writes of her verguenza (shame) of growing up poor and sixth
generation Mexican American, a sobering testimony of hardship and emotional
pain:

...[E]ating out of sacks, hiding our "lonches" papas con chorizo behind
cupped hands and bowed heads, gobbling them up before the other kids
could see. Guilt lay folded in the tortilla. The Anglo kids laughing—
calling us "tortilleros," the Mexican kids taking up the word and using it as
a club with which to hit each other. My brothers, sister and I started
bringing white bread sandwiches to school. After a while we stopped
taking our lunch altogether. . . . There is no beauty in poverty, in my
mother only being able to give one of her children lunch money. . . . It
was not very romantic for my sister and me to wear the dresses and panties my mother made us out of flour sacks because she couldn't afford store-bought ones like the other mothers. (pp. 201-202)

For many girls, reading, writing and succeeding academically (i.e., acquiring a strong linguistic and written command of English) provides a way out, or a temporary escape, from the painful conditions of poverty. While academic success for Hispanics results in higher socioeconomic status and a better quality of life, Anzaldúa reminds her readers that success sometimes has its price, and it is often paid in terms of linguistic identity. In her most acclaimed work, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), Anzaldúa tells how Chicanas (female Mexican Americans) often feel uncomfortable talking to other Chicanas, a shame that stems from childhood experiences and manifests in adulthood:

Chicanas who grew up speaking in Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.... To be closer to another Chicana is like looking into a mirror. We are afraid of what we'll see there. *Pena.* Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood, we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives. (p. 58)

A final theme in this literature, within the scope of this review, is women as objects of ownership. Female adolescents today are often brought up homes where they are conceived in this limited manner making it difficult for them to perceive themselves of someone other than somebody's daughter, girlfriend, or future wife. As Ana Castillo (1994) explains:

*Woman, as an object of ownership, was and is always susceptible to being "conquered" by someone outside the family. For this reason, "good girls,"*
while they may not wear veils or be covered from head to foot on the street) must not behave so as to elicit aggressive male behavior that would jeopardize family honor, or as more popularly put today: "get them in trouble." By the same token, honorable men do not enter the home of a married woman when she is alone. Again, all of these customs can be traced beyond our own Mexican culture and our Catholic beliefs, to our early patrimonial roots which we share with other women in other parts of the world. (p. 79)

In relating Castillo's depiction of women to issues of self-concept and school achievement, it is important to mention that girls are sometimes dissuaded from furthering their education beyond high school in many strictly traditional Mexican American households. Attending a university, in these families, is associated with acquiring la libertad (liberty or freedom), and is viewed negatively for women. As objects of ownership, women are denied the opportunity to find themselves in a position where they could be "conquered by someone outside the family," as Castillo states. As a result of this cultural belief, many teenage girls are discouraged from pursuing a higher education and confined to the idea that getting married, having children, and caring for aging parents are the only appropriate and realistic aspirations por todas las mujeres decentes (for all decent women).
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS, AND PROCEDURES

You know my methods. Apply them.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sign of Four (1890), ch. 6.

Case Studies

A case study is a "detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (Merriam, 1988). As Robert Stake (1995) explains, a "case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (xi). Elsewhere, (1994) he defines the case study as "both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning" (p. 237), and he identifies three types of case studies: the intrinsic, where the case itself is of interest; the instrumental, where a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of a theory; and the collective study, where the researcher studies a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population, or general condition (p. 237). Significantly, Stake views these categories as "more heuristic than functional" because researchers, the researched, and research reports rarely fit neatly into categories (p. 237). I think of my case studies as a combination of the aforementioned types located on a sort of continuum. At certain points, the case study is guided more directly by
intrinsic inquiry than instrumental; at others, the questions focus on instrumental issues rather than emphasizing its collective design, and so on.

Sharan B. Merriam's (1988) typology for cases studies in education (descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative) indicates "while some cases studies are purely descriptive, many more are a combination of description and interpretation or description and evaluation" (p. 29). In light of her typology, my case studies are a combination of the former two--description and interpretation. They are descriptive to the extent that "basic description of the subject[s] being studied comes before hypothesizing or theory testing" and interpretive to the extent that I gathered "as much information about the problem as possible with the intent of interpreting or theorizing about the phenomenon" (p. 28).

Case Study Samples

Case studies focus on the particular; hence, research samples are small. Michael Patton (1990) reminds us of the great impact studies with small samples have had in the social and behavioral sciences listing the works of Piaget, Freud, and Bandler & Grinder as examples (p. 185). He claims "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 185). Nevertheless, case study methodology has suffered because many researchers do not see them as important as studies that obtain generalizability pertaining to the population of cases. Robert Stake (1994) contends "they [researchers such as Denzin, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Herriot & Firestone, 1983; and Yin, 1984] have emphasized case study as a typification of other cases leading up to generalization-building studies, or as an occasional early step in theory building" (p. 238). Disagreeing with this approach, Stake acknowledges that while single cases are not as strong a base for generalizing to a population of cases as other
research designs, people can learn much that is general from single cases. As he (1995) puts it:

They do that partly because they are familiar with other cases and they add this one in, thus making a slightly new group from which to generalize, a new opportunity to modify old generalizations. People learn by receiving generalizations, explicated generalizations from others, regularly from authors, teachers, authorities. People also form generalizations from their experience. (p. 85)

Furthermore, Stake (1994) claims case studies teach us both prepositional (or explicated) and experiential knowledge as he elaborates in the following:

Certain descriptions and assertions are assimilated by readers into memory. When the researcher’s narrative provides opportunity for vicarious experience, readers extend their memories of happenings. Naturalistic, ethnographic case materials, to some extent, parallel actual experience, feeding into the most fundamental understanding. (p. 240)

Finally, in his collaborative piece with Deborah Trumbull (1982), Stake coins the term naturalistic generalizations to refer to generalizations people form from experiential knowledge:

[T]he reader comes to know some things told, as if he or she had experienced them. Enduring meanings come from encounter, and are modified and reinforced by repeated encounter. . . . Knowledge is socially constructed—we constructivists believe—and thus case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge. (cited in Stake, 1994, p. 240)

Over the years, I have learned a great deal from reading case studies. In fact, reading case studies has enabled me to be a more reflective, analytical, and knowledgeable secondary Language Arts/English teacher, graduate student, university instructor, and student teacher supervisor. Case studies have given me an awareness and understanding of experiences, processes, phenomena, and
behavior that I could not have experienced firsthand, but vicariously. As Robert Donmoyer (1990) states, "case studies can take us to places where most of us would not have an opportunity to go. . . . [they] allow us to look at the world through the researcher's eyes and, in the process, to see things we otherwise might not have seen" (pp. 192-196). The quality of my case studies depends largely on the extent to which my readers are able to vicariously experience my experience, and the degree to which they are able to draw naturalistic generalizations, thus expanding and extending what they already know about what students do in order to achieve academic success in the face of adversity.

Nested Case Studies

This dissertation is based on a series of nested case studies (a concept I borrowed from Richardson, Casanova, Placier, and Guilfoyle, 1989), the largest unit being the school. Later in this chapter, I describe the school as an organization, its instructional programs, demographics, and norms observed during my fieldwork experience. From documents such as the student handbook and pamphlets from the school administration office, informal conversations and interviews with school personnel, and my own observations of the school, I try to capture the school's social and cultural climate. Within the school, the ninth grade English classrooms were a smaller unit of these nested case studies. I describe the teachers and students in each of the classrooms I observed, the content curriculum, the students' learning strategies, levels of motivation and overall behavior, and the similarities and differences between the particular classrooms.

Finally, the smallest units were the single case studies of the research participants. These were developed by forming triangulated portraits of the teenagers in which the perspectives of their main caretakers, their English
teachers, and their own were portrayed. All of these perspectives are captured in vignettes and profiles (Seidman, 1991) I crafted and organized in the participants' own words so they reflect each participant's consciousness. I will display and analyze these portraits in Chapters 4 through Chapter 8.

It is important to note that although I have crafted profiles for all six of my research participants, I chose to write up three case studies for this dissertation. Following Bogdan and Biklin's (1992) advice about being practical, and making decisions regarding my choice of informants and allocation of time, was not easy because these decisions were made in the context of the study (p. 67). I chose to interview each participant's primary caretaker/parent and her English teacher twice during the data collection year in order to get a more complete picture of each participant's life. In addition, I interviewed each of the six participants formally three times during their freshman year in high school. Having transcribed and analyzed so many interviews, and having observed countless events and settings, I have collected more data than I can use or analyze during the time I have allotted for writing this document. Thus, I have made two important decisions: to include only three case studies at this time, and to present or publish the other three in the future.

At the outset of this study, I discussed the possibility of presenting each of the participants' stories in the aforementioned ways to my research participants and their parents given the study's emergent and inductive design. The participants, parents, and teachers were all very considerate of the possibility that I would have to publish some stories in the dissertation and others in research articles or conference presentations. I have been fortunate that they have all been very sensitive and understanding of my financial and time constraints.
Research Questions

Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen (1992) compare qualitative researchers to "loosely scheduled traveler[s]" as opposed to "traveler[s] who [make] detailed plans, with all the stops (including restaurants) and routes set in advance (p. 58) "to make the point that "qualitative researchers find the questions as products of data collection, rather than assumed a priori" (p. 58). They contend "the study itself structures the research, not preconceived ideas or any precise research design" (p. 58). Having understood the emergent nature of the qualitative research process, I wrote the following questions to guide my study expecting new questions to emerge from the data and that some of these preliminary questions might change.

1. What role does school play in the lives of the students in this sample?

2. How do the students in this sample view themselves and their place in the world?

3. To what extent are these students' self-concepts related to school success?

4. To what extent are these students' self-concepts shaped by their social statuses at school, their identities at home, and their relations with peers?

5. How do the resilient students in this sample cope with adverse life events and conditions that enable them to retain academic competence?
I selected participants based on several criteria: first, by having multiple at-risk factors as identified by De la Rosa & Maw (1990) including race/ethnicity, living in a poor household, being raised by a single parent, low parental education or income, and being home alone for extended periods of time; second, being identified as successful students by their teachers and themselves; third, having a history of academic achievement; and last, being a ninth grade student at the time of this study. Although students are legally required to attend school until the age of 18, or their parents may be fined for their truancy, some parents officially withdraw their sons or daughters who are younger than 18, reporting that they are planning to move to another city and they plan to enroll them in a school soon after (particularly migrants). At this point, the school where the student has withdrawn is unaccountable for that student, even if that student never attends school again. All too often, students as young as 14 or 15 are withdrawn from school by their parents and never return to school again.

Significantly, I did not begin this study with the intention of choosing female adolescents in particular. Given that research decisions evolve from fieldwork, participants were chosen based on several months of participant observation, teacher interviews, responses to a questionnaire, and general receptivity of participants to being part of a research study, as well as the aforementioned criteria.

There are some key definitions that I must address at this point such as my frequent reference to the terms "school success" and/or "academic success." A student has achieved school success has done so in the ordinary sense of having a high grade point average (3.0-4.0). By having a history of "academic achievement," I simply mean having consistently maintained a high GPA throughout their years in school. I define "coping" in the common sense of having "to face and deal with responsibilities or problems especially calmly or
adequately... [or] to struggle with some degree of success" (Webster's College Dictionary, 1991, p. 300). The term "life events" is borrowed from Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer (1990) who describe it in the following:

The term "life events" is used to include life experiences, stressors, challenges, bifurcations (Flach, 1989), and risks (Rutter, 1987). The term life events will include those normal biopsychosocial developmental crises as identified by Erickson (1963), cognitive development stages identified by Piaget (1952), and moral development experiences noted by Kohlberg (1976).

In addition to normal developmental periods of life, life events also include the barrage of positive and negative influences in a person's life that may cause disruptions or changes. Such influences are envirosocial in nature and include community, family, peers, gangs, living conditions, and media. Positively, challenges and opportunities not experienced before are part of the life events. Other influences or life events may result in pressures to engage in addictive behaviors (television, drugs, sex, food) or situations that result in threats to personal safety. (p. 35)

Finally, I use the term "resilient" to describe adolescents who exhibit "resiliency" as described simply by Richardson and his colleagues (1990) as "a process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from that event" (p. 34).

During the first few months of fieldwork, I tried to narrow down possible research participants by selecting students who would be information-rich cases. According to Michael Patton (1990), the "logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" and "information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 169). My goal for the purposeful sampling in this study was to "establish particular comparisons to illuminate the
reasons for the differences between the settings or the individuals" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 72). This is a common goal in multicase qualitative studies.

Data-Collection Methods

Harry Wolcott (1994) says "everything has the potential to be data, but nothing becomes data without the intervention of a researcher who takes note—and often makes note—of some things to the exclusion of others" (p. 3). He purports "in the very act of constructing data out of experience, the qualitative researcher singles out some things as worthy of note and relegates others to the background" (p. 13). In addition, Wolcott identifies three major modes through which qualitative researchers gather their data: "participant observation (experiencing), interviewing (enquiring), and studying materials prepared by others (examining)" (p. 10). Following in the tradition of experienced qualitative researchers such as Glesne & Peshkin (1992), who assert that "multiple-data-collection methods contribute to the trustworthiness of the data," I decided early to triangulate by data-collection method, by source, and by time.

I borrowed LeCompte and Preissle's (1993) idea of creating a data-planning matrix as a means of justifying my methods decisions by linking them to my research questions, and of developing a time line for acquisition. The first five questions on the matrix are my original questions which preceded fieldwork and guided the early stages of research. I included the latter five questions as I developed them immediately after I gained access to the fieldsite (See Table 3.1 in Appendices).

Triangulation

Patton (1990) defines triangulation as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena or programs" (p. 187). He says several kinds
of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches can be used in triangulation. Denzin (1989) asserts the logic of triangulation is based on the premise that "no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors. . . . Because method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observations must be employed" (p. 28). Marshall and Rossman (1995) describe triangulation in the following:

The act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point . . . designing a study in which multiple cases, multiple informants, or more than one gathering method are used can greatly strengthen the study's usefulness for other settings. (p. 144)

My research is designed to achieve triangulation via four methods of data collection including participant observation, interviewing, documents, and questionnaires. I triangulate by source insofar as I interview all six case study participants, one of their parents, and their respective English teachers. And last, I triangulate by time as I interviewed each participant at the beginning, middle, and end of the spring semester of their freshman year, and their parent/caretaker and teachers at the beginning and end of the year. I also recorded fieldnotes as a participant observer during the girls' respective English classes and lunch hours, football games, drama performances, ROTC practices, workplaces, and homes.

Participant Observation

Michael Patton (1990) explains the purpose of observational data is to "describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed" (p. 202). These descriptions must be "factual, accurate, and thorough without being cluttered by irrelevant minutiae and trivia" (202). The basic criterion to apply in judging a
recorded observation is "whether that observation permits the reader to enter into and understand the situation described" (p. 202). Finally, in participant observation, "the extent of participation is a continuum that varies from complete immersion in the setting as full participant to complete separation from the setting as spectator" (p. 206).

Two points on the continuum are discussed by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), who view a difference between "observer as participant" and "participant as observer" (p. 40). The former remains primarily an observer with some interaction with the study participants, and the latter is primarily a participant who may risk "losing the eye of the uninvolved outsider," yet has a "greater opportunity to learn" (p. 40). Since participant observation constituted a considerable portion of my fieldwork, I found myself at different points along this participant-observer continuum at different times in the data-collection process.

During the autumn semester of 1995, I was more an observer as participant, but as time passed, students in all of the English classrooms I observed encouraged me to take a more active role as a teacher's assistant. I helped them with individual and small group class activities, particularly, composition, vocabulary, and critical and literary analysis. In a way, the students saw me as a voluntary teacher, as they discovered I understood the content and was capable of assisting them in scaffolding situations. In another, they seemed to view me as an advocate who routinely showed up to their English classes every week simply because I was interested in them. My lack of authority (i.e., as a "real" teacher) enabled me to become a welcomed participant on regularly scheduled fieldwork days. In fact, on a few occasions where I walked in a few minutes late, students teased me for being tardy or remarked how they thought I'd forgotten about them.
Throughout the 1995-1996 data-collection year, I usually found an empty chair toward the back of each classroom, sat down, and began writing fieldnotes describing class activities, class culture, and interesting phenomena related to the study such as the following: (1) the teacher's lesson plans (usually listed on the board); (2) the teacher's interaction with the students and the degree to which they were engaged in the day's lessons, activities, and class assignments; (3) the teacher's presentation of the day's lesson; (4) the students' interactions with text and one another; and (5) the learning strategies and styles of particular students.

As I became more involved as a participant in the classroom, I usually found small blocks of time to write fieldnotes such as during tests, journal writing, silent sustained reading, and whole-class discussions regarding the literature component of the curriculum. Yet, when students were engaged in writing or cooperative learning situations, I opted for monitoring and tutoring instead. After the Christmas holiday, I concentrated more closely on observing and interacting with my case study participants. I paid particular attention to (1) their learning styles; (2) their levels of interest and engagement in class activities; (3) their class assignments; (4) their verbal and physical interactions with teachers and peers; and (5) their attitudes, moods, physical appearances, and emotional states.

As a participant observer, I often engaged in short informal conversations with students (and my research participants in particular, once selected and consented to be in the study) which I later described in my fieldnotes and often triggered questions for more formal guided interviews.

Qualitative Interviewing

An emergent research design and emphasis on interaction with the researched make participant observation and interviewing two effective,
generative, and ideal means for gathering rich data. I.E. Seidman (1991) explains the purpose of in-depth interviewing in the following:

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. (p. 3).

Steinar Kvale (1996) agrees maintaining "if you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?" (p. 1). In his description of the qualitative research interview as a "construction site of knowledge . . . an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 2), Kvale touches on the ontological and epistemological undercurrents of this study—my ontological assumption that reality is constructed through human interactions, and my epistemological position that understanding (or coming to know) someone's reality is discovered by finding out how people name their reality through language.

I interviewed my case study participants informally (and often) in the immediate context of the classroom in my role as a participant observer using an informal conversational interview approach. The informal conversational interview is described by Patton (1990) as "the most open-ended approach to interviewing" whereby the conversational interviewer "wants to maintain maximum flexibility to be able to pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate, depending on what emerges from observing a particular setting or from talking to one or more individuals in that setting" (p. 281). I utilized this approach throughout the year, and found it useful for starting relationships, particularly for getting to know my research participants as individuals and developing trust and rapport between us. Negotiating a research relationship is not easy. As J.A.
Maxwell (1996) purports, "your relationship with those you study is a complex and changing entity... the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationship is the means by which the research gets done" (p. 66). Later in this chapter, I discuss my role as an ethnographic fieldworker; specifically, the benefits and the problems I encountered as an Insider/Outsider researcher struggling to maintain relationships, manage roles, and deal with reciprocity issues while phasing out of the field.

Conversational interview questions were individualized "to establish in-depth communication with the person being interviewed and [made] use of the immediate surroundings and situations to increase the concreteness and immediacy of the interview questions and responses" (p. 282). I often recorded the gist of these interviews in my fieldnotes and later wrote more detailed notes and reflections in my reflective journal. Since the open-ended approach could not guarantee that I ask the same questions to all the girls, I chose to interview them more formally in their homes after school at appointed times using the general guided interview approach (Patton, 1990) where "an interview guide is prepared in order to make sure that basically the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material" (p. 283). This method proved to be more streamlined than informal conversational interviews as I was able to "provide topics or subjects areas within which [I would be] free to explore, probe, and ask questions that [would] elucidate and illuminate particular subject[s]" (p. 283). Guided interviews made it easier for me to analyze data and to generalize internally among this group of research participants. Maxwell (1996) describes internal generalizability as "generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studied... the descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity of the conclusions depend on their internal generalizability to the case as a whole" (p. 97). Hence, the following:
If you are studying the patterns of interactions between the teacher and students in a single classroom, your account of that classroom as a whole is seriously jeopardized if you have selectively focused on particular students or kinds of interactions and ignored others. (p. 97)

I will discuss internal generalizability to a fuller extent in the final chapter of this document.

Practically, more formal guided interviewing permitted me to understand how my case study participants' viewed themselves, family members, peers, home, school, neighborhood, and community. Interviews served as a context for sharing their visions of the future in terms of higher education, career goals, and personal dreams of "getting married" or "having a family someday," as well as a time for self-reflection and undivided attention from a caring adult. As we began to know one another, the girls, teachers, and parents in the study began asking me questions about my life, inviting me to share information about myself as a future college professor, a former secondary teacher, a professional Latina with working class roots, a woman, wife, and graduate student, and I was happy to answer their questions, for this process allowed for a more reciprocal relationship between participants and myself. As Shulamit Reinharz (1992) asserts "interviewing is consistent in avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with people" (p. 20). In my experience, I found that taking time to develop relationships with the Hispanic adolescent girls in this study was important for enhancing trustworthiness, connecting with my research participants in a meaningful and personable way, and generating information-rich interview data.

Analyzing Documents
Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest documents are the source of data that "corroborate your observations and interviews and thus make your findings more trustworthy... they may raise questions about your hunches and thereby shape new directions for observations and interviews" (p. 52). I began collecting documents in the field right from the start, hoping they would enable me to portray the values and beliefs of the case study students, their teachers, the school administrators, and the community at large.

Hence, school officials' values and beliefs became apparent in documents such as the student handbook, the mission statement of the school, classwork assignments, and posters on bulletin boards in school hallways and classrooms. Documents describing the community as a whole were obtained from newspaper articles and the city's Chamber of Commerce (e.g., statistics referring to population, racial make-up, economic outlook, employment, industry, places of worship, and so on). Copies of school records displaying information about Amistad High School, such as the number of teachers, staff members, administrators, students, racial composition of the aforementioned groups, list of educational programs available, and number of students enrolled in each type of program were obtained from the Administration Office. Finally, in the girls' English classes, I was able to view documents of works in progress (which I described and reflected on in fieldnotes and journal entries), and to access copies of my case study students' academic records from the Counseling office at the high school with their parents' signed permission. I will discuss the process of obtaining consent later in this chapter in my discussion of ethics.

**Questionnaires**

David Fetterman (1989) explains that in "filling out a questionnaire, the respondent completes the researcher's form without any verbal exchange or
clarification”; thus, “knowing whether the researcher and the respondent are on
the same wavelength, sharing common assumptions and understandings about
the questions, is difficult—perhaps impossible” (p. 65). Despite this limitation, he
states, “questionnaires are an excellent way to ask questions dealing with
representativeness” (p. 66). My intent for developing and distributing a
questionnaire after six weeks of participant observation in each of the girls’
English classes was threefold: (1) to narrow down prospective research
candidates who had multiple at-risk characteristics and were experiencing
academic success; (2) to determine which students would be more willing to take
part in this research project by assessing their general receptivity to answering
the questions posed in this instrument; and (3) to give students the opportunity
to offer their opinions about why some students succeed academically despite
adversity, while others seemed doomed to fail. Thus, the questionnaire became a
research tool that enabled me “to learn about the distribution of characteristics,
attitudes, [and] beliefs” of this research sample (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p.
95).

**Data Analysis Strategies**

One of the main things an ethnographic fieldworker must be able to do
with her data is think clearly about it. David Fetterman (1989) states that
"analysis is a test of the ethnographer's ability to think— to process information in
a meaningful and useful manner. The ethnographer confronts a vast array of
complex information and needs to make some sense of it all—piece by piece" (pp.
88-89). In addition, Hammersley & Atkinson (1983) remind us data analysis is
not a distinct stage of research and "it begins with the pre-fieldwork phase, in the
formulation and clarification of research problems, and continues into the
writing up" (p 174).
I chose to utilize several data analysis methods before and during data-collection including the following: (1) writing pre-observational notes before officially gaining access to research settings; (2) writing "observational comments" in the margins of my fieldnotes taken during participant-observation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992); (3) writing detailed descriptive and reflective journal entries based on field visits, interviews, events, documents, and other contacts with research participants; (4) exploring literature during fieldwork that stimulated my thinking and enhanced analysis; (5) transcribing all interviews, permitting me to formulate questions for future interviews; (6) and reviewing printed data, marking it up with large, descriptive, preliminary categories.

Given that interview transcripts constituted the largest portion of my data, I chose to follow Seidman's (1991) method for managing and sharing in-depth interview data especially useful. He explains the process as "one way to solve the problem the interviewer has of how to share what he or she has learned from the interviews" (pp. 92-93). Seidman (1991) explains his process in the following:

First, I have developed profiles of individual participants and grouped them in categories that made sense. Second, I have marked individual passages, grouped these in categories, and then studied the categories for thematic connections within and among them. (p. 91)

I found this method especially appealing and appropriate because crafting a profile in the participant's own words allows the interviewer to use those words "to reflect the person's consciousness. . . . the narrative form of the profile allows the interviewer to transform this learning into telling a story" (pp. 91-92). As a rationale for crafting profiles, Seidman (1991) cites Mishler's (1986) work which describes narrative as a way of knowing. However, he notes his purposes derived from something else:
I have found crafting profiles, however, to be a way to find and display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant's experience, to share the coherence the participant has expressed, and to link the individual's experience to the social and organizational context within which he or she operates. (p. 91)

Crafting profiles is a sequential process that Seidman explains clearly and systematically (pp. 92-93). It requires that transcripts be read first; then read again, marking up passages of interest. Next, one labels those passages (i.e., with codewords or themes), makes two copies of the marked and labeled transcripts, and cuts and files the marked passages into folders or computer files that correspond to the labels one devises for each passage. The original transcript remains uncut so it serves as a reference. Then, from the first copy of the transcript, one cuts all the passages marked as important and pastes them together into a single transcript. The cut and paste version ends up about one-third to one-half the length of the original.

After this, the cut and paste version is read with "a more demanding eye" and one is ready to craft the profile (p. 92). I followed these steps closely making sure I used the first person (the voice of the participant), and I was "faithful to the words of the participants" (p. 93). I adopted Seidman's system of notation, placing inserted words or short phrases in brackets as not to interrupt the flow of the participant's story; inserting ellipses to identify omitted material from a paragraph, or when I skipped paragraphs (or even pages) of transcripts; deleting excessive "uhms," "ahs," and "you knows" that in Seidman's words "do not do justice in a written version of what he or she has said" (p. 93).

I tried to present the material in the profiles in the order in which it came in the interviews, and used pseudonyms for all participants to protect their identities. I took the added measure of supplying pseudonyms for the school and town, and changed the school's colors, mascot, and some of the aesthetic
features of the main school building for the sake of anonymity as well. The
town's location in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas, and the statistics
provided in Chapter 4, are factual, as are the statistics I obtained regarding the
school's population, programs, and problems.

Researcher Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships

Rosalie Wax (1971) views the task of the fieldworker as realizing what the
researched have experienced and learned and communicating this "in terms that
will illuminate significant areas of the social sciences" (pp. 3-4). She contends
"while the outsider simply does not know the meaning or the patterns, the
insider is so immersed that [she] may be oblivious to the fact that patterns exist," a
process Hortense Powdermaker (1966) refers to as "stepping in and out of
society" (cited in Wax, 1971, p. 19). In essence, Wax assumes the researcher is
always the one who researches the Insider/Other (p. 3). Conceived as an
outsider who has little or no understanding of her research participants' culture,
the researcher becomes immersed in her fieldwork, as she tries "to become
capable of thinking and acting within the perspective of two quite different
groups, the one in which [she was] reared and-- to some degree-- the one [she is]
studying" (p. 3). Moreover, what she eventually "produces out of this tension
developed by this ability to shift [her] point of view depends on [her]
sophistication, ability, and training" (p. 3).

I am a Mexican American woman from the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and
I share the same ethnic and gender constructions as my adolescent research
participants; thus, I am an insider. I have lived out of the Valley two times in my
life, a total of nine years, and both times, in pursuit of higher education.
Therefore, I know what it is like to "step out" of my community from time to
time. Having "been reconstituted by other discourses and practices" (St. Pierre,
1997), and yet being able to hear myself as I listened to the girls tell their stories, I realized the complexity of my researcher position as "both identity and difference, self and other, knower and known, researcher and researched" (p. 178).

Thus, several insider privileges became apparent to me during this research process. For instance, I believe my case study participants, their parents, and teachers may have been more receptive to becoming involved in this study than they would have been had I not been an ethnic insider. Maxine Baca Zinn (1979) purports the insider is "less apt to encourage distrust and hostility, and the experience of being excluded (e.g., as a white educator) from communities, or being allowed to 'see' only what people of color want them to see" (p. 212). She adds that people in minority communities have developed so many "self-protective behaviors" for dealing with outsiders, "it is quite reasonable to question whether many real behaviors for dealing with outsiders are accessible to outsiders of another color" (p. 212).

Similarly, professor emeritus Americo Paredes (1977), argues ethnographers frequently misrepresent Mexican American culture because they are unaware of the "performance element" of Chicano behavior. Informants, "often tell their ethnographer what they think the ethnographer wants to hear" (cited in Baca Zinn, 1979, p. 29):

The informant not only has his stereotypes about the Anglo fieldworker, but he also has some very definite ideas as to what stereotypes the Anglo holds about him. Sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, the informant may seek to conform to the stereotype he thinks the Anglo fieldworker has of him rather than expressing his own attitudes and opinions. (cited in Baca Zinn, 1979, p. 29)
From the outset of this project, ethnic, gender, class, professional and marital status facilitated relationships and negotiations with participants and informants in positive, constructive, yet uniquely different ways. For instance, although I was aware I needed time to develop relationships with people in this study, I could not anticipate the manner these identity constructs would shape relationships with research participants. In essence, several types of relationships emerged, inviting me to consider "insider privilege" more closely.

For example, with students, I was perceived as a model of success in my role of university instructor. At the same time, they identified with me in my role as a student struggling for academic success. Moreover, having identified myself as "the learner" in this project, strengthened the reciprocal nature of our relationships as the girls developed a sense of empowerment and equality throughout this project.

Three Hispanic mothers identified with me as a peer and an ally who could help them develop closer relationships with their daughters and who would be a positive role model for them as well. Two mothers often sought my advice and opinions on matters involving problems their daughters' were experiencing, or problems they were encountering with their daughters. The last mother I worked with simply viewed me as a professional woman whose relationship with her daughter would be a positive experience. A comptroller for a local business, this woman identified with me as a working Hispanic woman seeking opportunities for professional advancement. Finally, the two fathers in this study viewed me as a positive, female, Hispanic role model for their daughters.

I had doubts about "insider privilege" as relationships strengthened and I began to problematize how my identities came into play. As previously mentioned, I positioned myself as a teacher's assistant and advocate to all of the
students in three ninth grade English classrooms; and ultimately, this role grew into something more personal with each of the girls who became my research participants. As I began interviewing each of the girls, a great sense of responsibility and recognizability grew within me. Something about each of them reminded me of myself at their age, of the female adolescents I taught when I was a ninth grade English teacher, and of girls and women I associate with today among family and friends. There were many reflective moments during fieldwork where my past, the girls' present, and our future seemed to blend together in time. The following excerpt from my journal illuminates this type of fieldwork occurrence.

May 24, 1995

... I hear my own teenage voice when I'm with these girls. I see myself in Mary who tries so hard to do well in school and deals ever-so-cautiously with her protective father who doesn't believe fifteen year olds have any business dating; Annabel, who is constantly confronted with negative peer pressure and vulnerable to it because she is a poor Mexican girl growing up in a materialistic society; Rachel, who lives vicariously through her friends knowing that experiencing firsthand sometimes hurts; Lupita, whose family life conflicts most starkly with her school life; Jaisa, who knows her potential, but doesn't seem to care much about reaching it; and Skye, whose silent cries for help aren't being heard by the one person she loves the most. I remember experiencing all of these types of things when I was their age. How painful, confused, and alone I sometimes felt. I think most women can identify with at least a few of these things....

Some of their homes look (and even smell) like my home as a girl. When I ask their parents questions, I hear my parents respond in a mixture of English and Spanish phrases. When these girls look at me, I imagine they wonder if they will be like me—an educated Latina, successful, married, happy. I imagine their parents wondering, hoping, expecting. This makes my position as a researcher so complex. I'm like these girls, but different too. I'm like these parents, but different too. I'm even like these teachers, but different too. I have no legitimate power over anyone involved in this project, yet I am the most powerful participant of all.
My insider privilege was certainly an empirical and methodological advantage, but where did it get me in political terms? As usual, I existed on the fringes of two worlds, with one foot at home, the other on foreign ground. Like Sofia Villenas (1996) who problematizes how her identities came into play while conducting research in an emerging Latino community, I was aware of my potential as both the colonizer and the colonized:

While qualitative researchers in the field of education theorize about their own privilege in relation to their research participants, the "native" ethnographer must deal with her own marginalizing experiences and identities in relation to dominant society. This "native" ethnographer is potentially both the colonizer, in her university cloak, and the colonized, as a member of the very community that is made "other" in her research. (p. 712)

I tried to create a space somewhere between my marginalized and powerful subject locations during data-collection by posturing myself in ways that would allow for a more reciprocal balance of power: (1) as a learner interested in the experiences of adolescent Mexican American girls as something important to know and understand; (2) as a fellow Latina operating from the discourse of success, rather than of failure; (3) as a student who could identify with these teens in my struggle to succeed academically and manage numerous other responsibilities [such as juggling full-time faculty status, unfunded dissertation research, and my first year of marriage]; and (4) as a newcomer to Amistad City with plans to make it my permanent home—someone who wanted to attend their high school graduations, and hoped to continue to cross paths in their lives from time to time.

Often, the girls commented on how easy it was to talk to me even though questions I posed were not always easy to talk about. Some of them felt "honored" to have been chosen to become part of this study. These comments
made me think about myself as the research instrument; particularly, how my race and sex made a difference. As Fine and Sandstrom (1988) remind us:

By adolescence, the characteristics of a researcher do make a difference . . . who the researcher is (in terms of societal categories) tells the informants a lot about this person's attitudes and whether he or she is likely to be a good bet as a friend or a confidante. (pp. 66-67).

My conscious and unconscious attempts to gain the girls' trust and elicit truthful, rich data were intricately connected to who I am, as well as my personal experiences as a border dweller, a border traveler, and a new mestiza "accustomed to tensions and struggles of constant identity adaptations" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79).

Procedures: Gaining Access

I formally gained access to Amistad City High School as my research site on July 18, 1995 via the superintendent, Mr. Ryan. A seasoned administrator of several North Texas schools, this was Mr. Ryan's first year as a superintendent in a Rio Grande Valley school district. His reputation as an austere, impersonal, and intimidating man certainly proceeded him. Mr. Ryan is a White male in his sixties, of average height, with short, white hair, small eyes, a pronounced chin, and deeply formed frown lines on his forehead.

During an appointed time, I met with him at his office. As I walked in, I introduced myself, extending my hand (which he did not take), and I talked about the purpose of my study, the nature of my inquiry, and the reasons for wanting to gain access at Amistad City High School. Although he did not appear to be listening to me (he never actually gave me eye contact or asked me relevant questions concerning my plans for the study), in the end, he gave me permission
to use Amistad City High School as a research site as long as I did nothing that would "hurt or misrepresent Amistad City High in any way."

I expressed my appreciation noting the opportunity to work at Amistad High School would be extremely convenient and economical for me as it is a five minute drive from my home. In addition, I offered to bring him a letter of agreement in a few days, so he would have written documentation of my presence at the high school, and he agreed to it (see Appendix A). He told me to call the principal, Mrs. Chavez, and tell her I had his permission to conduct my research study at her school. This time, he took my hand when I extended it, and I breathed a sigh of relief as I left his office.

A few days later, the letter of agreement was given to and signed by the superintendent of the school district, the principal of the school, the chair of my committee, and myself. It basically outlined the purpose and design of the study and addressed ethical issues such as confidentiality (enacted through changing names, safeguarding data, and destroying all tapes and transcriptions upon completion of the project), participants' rights to end the study at any time, and reciprocity (i.e., tutoring students during class time and after school).

I called Mrs. Chavez a few days later, and was pleasantly surprised to discover that Mr. Ryan had already talked to her on my behalf. She invited me to a teacher inservice day scheduled the week before school started so I could meet some teachers and gain access to several ninth grade English classrooms. The following is an excerpt from participant observation notes taken during the teacher inservice:

I just spoke to Mrs. Chavez, the principal. What a friendly greeting! She seems to want to accommodate me. Asked me what I needed today. My reply— "I want to meet the English teachers just to start to get to know them, and I want to meet with the chair of the department and have her help me gain access to several teachers' classrooms." Mrs. Chavez is so
helpful. She is wearing a bright, yellow suit and is walking around the school making sure the teachers get to their assigned departmental inservice meetings. I have given her a draft of my proposal and she has assured me she would meet with me at 10 a.m. She also just introduced me to Loraine, the chair of the English department.

Beginning Fieldwork and Becoming Part of the Classroom Culture

During the first stage of fieldwork, I used the "big net" approach, mixing and mingling with everyone I encountered at Amistad City High— from administrators to teachers, office staff to students. Fetterman (1989) says the big net approach "ensures a wide-angle view of events before the microscopic study of specific interactions begins. This big picture helps refine an ethnographer's focus and aids the fieldworker in understanding the finer details that he or she will capture in notes for further analysis" (p. 42). An early big net approach in this study enabled me to clear my mind and to observe people, places, and events as I encountered them. From the outset of this project, I was eager to capture details in my mind, record them in my notes and field journal, and, in Erickson's oft-quoted phrase (1973), "make the familiar strange and the strange familiar" (cited in Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 42).

Two weeks after the school year officially started, I attended an English department meeting where I was allowed to introduce myself, explain the purpose of my study, and wait for teachers to volunteer to become part of the project. For the sake of brevity, I passed out a memo to all the ninth grade English and Language Arts teachers outlining the project, and specifically, what it would entail for the teacher informants. An informed consent form was attached to this memo (see Appendix A) which stated that teachers' names and background information would be altered and all tapes and transcriptions would be destroyed at the completion of the study to maintain confidentiality. At the meeting's end, three teachers approached me, welcoming me into their
classrooms so that I might have opportunities to ease into these settings, work with their students, and eventually, chose a few case study participants. We scheduled dates and times for my first visit in each of the classrooms.

Since qualitative research focuses on small samples (Patton, 1990), I decided to visit at least one ninth grade English classroom per ability grouping. This meant I would initially visit at least one Regular, one Advanced, one Honors, and one Gifted and Talented classroom per week. Fortunately, of my three teacher volunteers, one taught Regular English courses, one taught Advanced, and the other taught Honors and Gifted & Talented (GT) English. With their cooperation, we came up with scheduled days and times when I would regularly visit all four classes on one weekday for one hour every week of the fall semester.

**Establishing My Role: Participant Observation**

My plan was to spend extensive time in the field during the first stage of research as a participant observer. When I met with each section of 9th grade students, their teachers gave me a few minutes before teaching their lessons, to stand in front of their particular classes, introduce myself, explain the purpose of my research, and describe my role in the classroom. I simply explained my interest in learning about learning strategies (or what students do) in order to be successful in school, and my belief that if I closely observed and listened to students who have a history of academic success, and are currently performing up to par, I would probably learn something about academic failure.

In addition, I described my role as that of a participant observer who sometimes participates in classroom activities, such as monitoring group work and tutoring individual students with class assignments, and that, other times,
sits at the back of the classroom and jots down notes about what I see. I explained my notes would include descriptions of the classroom as a culture—generally speaking, what students look like, what they do, what rules they abide by, and what they say in class that contributes to their learning processes. Having said this, I shared my desire to get to know them gradually and naturally, and eventually (before the Christmas holidays) to narrow down my selections for possible case study participants. I stressed that, at this point, they were not participants in a research study, but I would be asking one or two people to participate more substantially as case study participants after a few months of participant observation.

Questions Regarding Reciprocity

In all of the class sections, at least one student asked me questions directed at reciprocity. They knew what I would get from conducting this research, but what would they gain if I were to choose them as case study participants? This was a fair question I felt prepared to answer. I told the students I could offer them my tutorial assistance, and that, hopefully, they would also come to view me as a person who is truly interested in them as an advocate, a researcher, and a friend. I asked them to consider me an adult they could confide in and that would try to be a positive influence in their lives. Then, I suggested that being a case study participant would give them opportunities for self-examination—to truly reflect and analyze themselves as individuals with experiences in and out of school that affect their academic performance.

After the initial "question and answer" session with each section of ninth graders, I provided every student with a letter for their parents to read and sign so I could document their knowledge of my presence in their child's English classrooms. I wrote two versions of the letter, one in English and one in Spanish,
and asked each student to take a copy of the letter their parents would prefer reading (Appendix B). Over the next few weeks, about 75% of the signed letters were returned to me.

Narrowing The Focus

After six weeks of participant observation, I realized that choosing case study participants was more difficult than I had anticipated. Although I had gradually developed a friendly rapport with most students in these sections, there were limited opportunities to talk to them about topics other than classwork assignments, which up to this point, were not generating many discussions about their home lives, self-concepts, or experiences with schooling. As a result, I developed a questionnaire that would enable me to begin to "hone in" on a select few who would be potential candidates for research participants (see Appendix C). Ultimately, the questionnaire became a research tool for purposeful sampling.

Keeping the open nature of qualitative inquiry in mind— that it "precludes the ability to know either all of the important selection criteria or the number of observation or interview sessions necessary to gather adequate data," (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 25), I developed twenty questions that would enable me to identify successful students with more than two "at-risk" characteristics, high GPAs, positive views about schooling, and plans for the future. Other questions addressed students' favorite and least favorite subjects, views about reading and writing, attitudes about school success and failure, opinions about cheating, and feelings about belonging in their particular English class.

Even as I developed the questionnaire, I realized the possibility that I neglected to ask more salient questions that would narrow and refine the focus of my study. However, I did not allow my apprehensiveness to interfere with my
process because, as Glesne & Peshkin point out, "the selection strategy evolves as
the researcher collects data" (p. 25). Therefore, I tried to be open to the
possibilities of changing my sample size, my selection criteria, and even my
entire focus, if necessary.

Two weeks after distributing the questionnaires to the students, I had
already analyzed them and begun to get an idea as to which students would
make "information rich" cases. At this time, I conducted my first round of
guided teacher interviews (Appendix D) as a way of determining the cooperating
teachers' attitudes and beliefs about teaching their particular classifications of
students. I was also interested in deciphering the teachers' perceptions of at-
riskness, and discovering whom they would identify as at-risk students and high
achieving students in their particular classrooms. Lastly, I was anxious to
discover the extent to which my perceptions of their students matched with
theirs.

**Ethical Issues: Obtaining Consent**

I created an English and Spanish version of an oral script outlining what
was to be said to each research participant and their parent(s) during my initial
home visit and asked for their permission to allow their respective daughters to
become part of the study. The form included the purpose for the study, some
general research questions, the student's role in the study, what the study would
require of the student, confidentiality, and reciprocity. During my first home
visit, I asked parents for their permission to obtain copies of their daughters' 
school records to provide evidence of previous and current academic success,
and I asked for permission to audiotape all interviews. These requests were
documented on this consent form and signed and dated by all of the parents
involved.
In addition to this oral script/consent form, I administered the HS-027 consent form from the Office of Research Risks Protection at the The Ohio State University to all parents. After reading it aloud and making sure parents understood it, I asked for their signed permission once again. On the next home visit, I gave parents copies of both forms with their signatures for their personal reference. I translated the form to Spanish for parents who were Spanish dominant.

The last form I created was a student assent form documenting what the girls could expect as a case study participant, their right to stop participating in the project at any time, and my reassurance that confidentiality would be enacted through the use of pseudonyms and that all data would be destroyed upon completion of the research (see Appendix A for all consent forms).
CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS:

A SERIES OF NESTED CASE STUDIES OF A TOWN,
A SCHOOL, AND SOME TEACHERS WHO WORK THERE

The Town

Like many American small towns, Amistad City has a rich, historical past, a thriving present, and a promising future. Located in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Amistad City is the county seat of Arrowhead County and has a modest population of 30,000. According to a Texas comptroller report (Sharp, 1995), the city is 20 miles north of the Mexican border and is well-positioned geographically to become a major player in the South Texas border economy. Improved state and national economies, the passage of NAFTA, and the designation of an "empowerment zone" by the U.S. Congress in May 1993, have all contributed to a positive outlook for local residents (p. 1).

Until recently, the financial state was rather bleak for a significant number of Amistad City's citizens. The 1990 census showed that employment among adults 16 years and older stood at 10,700 with the majority of jobs concentrated in the service (44.5%) and trade (23.5%) sectors of the economy. The unemployment rate in the city held at 12.8% in 1993, down from 14.8% in 1989 (cited in Sharp, 1995, p. 1).
As the county seat of Arrowhead County, the city's employment is found most concentrated in the government sector. The largest employer in the city is the Amistad City Consolidated Independent School District which employs 2,600 people. Other major government employers include the county, the local university, a state facility for mental health and mental retardation, and a state department of human services. In addition, a clothing, an electronics, and a tortilla factory are included in the list of major employers of the town.

The population distribution by race in Amistad City is 86% Hispanic, 13% White, and 1% Black. Women make up 52% of the city's population, compared to 48% men (1990 Census, cited in Sharp, 1995). The median household income is very low—only $18,956. This falls well below the state average of $27,016. Furthermore, the comptroller’s report indicates 37% of Amistad City’s households have incomes below $13,000; 61% have incomes between $13,000 and $99,999; and only 2% have incomes of $100,000 or better. Per capita income for the town is $7,474 compared to $12,904 statewide. In 1990, one third of the population had incomes below the poverty level (pp. 3-4).

Amistad City's townspeople are mostly Catholics who belong to one of three large Catholic parishes. However, the town also meets the spiritual needs of other Christian religions. Within the city limits, there are two Pentacostal churches, a Church of Christ, an Episcopal Church, a Community Church, a Lutheran Church, and a Methodist Church. In addition, the university has a Catholic Ministry Building, a Baptist Center, and a Methodist Center.

A common interest that divides Amistad City residents is high school football. In an effort to satisfy the educational needs of the town's growing population, a second school, Amistad East High School, was built in 1990. This event split the town's community spirit considerably. Suddenly, the
Amistad City Coyotes were confronted with a city rival, The Amistad City Wolverines. As a result, relationships between eastside and westside residents grows somewhat tense during football season. Today, as the sports rivalry continues, Amistad High is best known for academics, while Amistad East has a reputation for its strong athletic program. When either school advances beyond district competition in academics or athletics, the healthy rivalry between schools is generally put aside with the entire town supporting both schools in Amistad City.

Local politics in Arrowhead county is run, to a large extent, by the old "compadre network." In other words, "who you know" makes a considerable difference when it comes to winning local elections. Most of the county's leaders are affluent professionals of Hispanic descent with humble beginnings. In fact, many have family ties in the Rio Grande Valley that span over five and six generations. Last year, Arrowhead county residents experienced an embarrassing situation when illegal activities among county officials were discovered. The news made local and state newspaper headlines and topped the evening news for months. Although a few officials were wrongly accused, and eventually cleared by the courts, the series of trials created major rifts between government officials and their constituents. Mistrust of local government was clearly visible on election day when fewer voters turned out at the polls than in recent years.

The city's cultural distinctiveness is apparent in the types of foods Amistad City's townspeople like to eat. Currently, four of five restaurants are Mexican. In fact, restaurants that serve traditional American food typically add a few traditional Mexican entrees to their menus. A considerable number of popular fast-food restaurants such as Subway, McDonalds, KFC, Pizza Hut, and Burger King light up the streets of Amistad at night. No mall or
movie theater exists in the town; however, there is a bowling alley, a historical museum, a public library, a coffee house, an ice cream parlor, a public golf course, several softball and memorial parks, a well-equipped Boy's and Girl's Club, several video rental stores, a shopping center in the downtown area, and, of course, a Walmart Super Center. Much of the town's arts and sports entertainment is provided at the university where theater performances, symphonies, art exhibits, a visiting author series, and college basketball, baseball, soccer, and track events are open to the public.

The School

In a phone interview with Mr. Davis, the building program coordinator of Amistad City C.I.S.D., I learned that Amistad City High School was built in 1981. It was one of the first high schools in the Valley that was enclosed; that is, the entire school is contained in one main building. It contains two gymnasiums, a sunken and tiered cafetorium, a spacious library, numerous administrative offices, a well-equipped computer lab, and ample classrooms that collectively hold 1800 students. When I first entered the contemporary structure, I was immediately impressed with the beautiful basement-level library to my right. Wall-length, surrounding windows invited me to look into the well-stocked learning resource center. Twenty-five computers for database and automated card catalog searches, more than a dozen round and rectangular tables with matching, comfortable reading chairs, and thousands of books fill the vacuous place.

To the left of the wide entrance hall, a sitting area adorned with seasonal potted plants, flowers, and indoor palm trees create a relaxing place for reading books or enjoying conversations with friends. During football season, this area is often transformed as students display weekly spirited scenes depicting a
stuffed, wild coyote (the school's mascot) attacking the opposing team's mascot. On one of the beams on the high vaulted ceiling, in bold, maroon and gold capital letters, reads THOROUGH THESE HALLS WALK THE GREATEST STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN THE WORLD!!

The front office is at the end of the main entrance hall. Once inside, the secretary's desk is on the left side facing the door, and the principal's office is located to the right. Coyote paraphernalia surround the walls of the sitting area just outside the principal's office. Once inside the main office, a short corridor leads to four vice-principals' offices. Directly outside the office, rows of maroon and gold lockers stand tall; one available for each student. To the left of the front office, a massive cafeterium with roughly 200 hundred tables and 1200 chairs surrounds the impressive stage with velvet, maroon curtains and the letters A.C.H.S. embroidered in gold at the top center.

Within the last few years, the school's student population has quickly surpassed the 1800 person building capacity. This year, there are 2454 students enrolled at Amistad City High—654 more than the building is designed to comfortably accommodate. Ten temporary portable classroom buildings located at the west, north, and east sides of the school were purchased to compensate for the overcrowding. Three years ago, administrators were forced to create three lunch periods and an "early bird" breakfast/class period to meet the nutritional and instructional needs of Amistad's burgeoning student body. Despite this temporary solution, on any given lunch hour, it is difficult to get to one's destination without being pushed and shoved, or having a door occasionally slam into one's face.

There are other problems at Amistad City High School. One of the most obvious is having only two restrooms available for almost 2500 students. Although four restrooms exist in the building, two of them are locked up due to
repeated incidents of vandalism. Despite the presence of six security guards patrolling the campus everyday, and two police officers watching students during lunch periods, the extra security is not an effective deterrent for students who continue to cause problems.

Mr. Kellogg, a former teacher and a new vice principal, informed me that discipline and tardies are the most challenging problems that administrators and teachers confront on an everyday basis. He believes more security is "fundamentally necessary" in an overpopulated closed campus like Amistad High. The school board apparently agrees. They have recently approved hiring four additional security guards for next year. To combat problems with tardies, teachers are assigned to "sweep the halls." This means during the first five or ten minutes of their conference periods, they escort tardy students in their respective hallways to the cafetorium where they are assigned detention. Any student outside of class during classtime must wear a fluorescent yellow vest (one is provided for each teacher), so that they will not be "swept" by a monitoring teacher. According to Mr. Kellogg, this procedure has reduced the amount of tardies substantially.

In another conversation with Mr. Davis, the building program coordinator, he identified another significant problem with the building. Evidently Amistad City High is not equipped to abide by the latest handicap codes. Although there are ramps at every entrance for students who are physically handicapped, more structural changes will be made during the summer of 1997. In fact, the school board recently budgeted $200,000 for remodeling. According to Mr. Davis, the school has sufficient entrances and exits and restroom facilities for the handicapped, but since there are no windows that can be opened in the school, a fire sprinkler system was installed last year, and the wall paneling was brushed with a fire resistant varnish.
Outside the school, there is a football stadium that Amistad City High School and Amistad City East High School share and doubles as a soccer field. A golf range, running path, and hurricane-fenced parking lot, with a separate security entrance and exit and security guards on duty throughout the day, make up the rest of the school facilities on the north and west sides of the school. Most of the temporary portable buildings are located on the east side of campus; the front of the school faces south.

Approaching the front of the red brick building, a circular drive serves as a drop-off and pick-up area and a temporary loading zone. Ten parking spaces designated for principals, counselors, a school nurse, and visitors are available at the front entrance. An American and a Texas state flag flap wildly in the South Texas wind on two, tall flag poles at the front yard of the school, behind a red brick wall with glossy, black letters that read "Amistad City High School, Home of the Fighting Coyotes!"

The School’s Reputation

Amistad City High School is one of the top three schools in the Rio Grande Valley recognized for its strong emphasis on academic excellence. It has a reputable theater arts department, dance team, and University Interscholastic League team (better known at U.I.L.) which compete and succeed every year in extemporaneous and dramatic speaking, writing, science, and mathematics competitions at district, regional, and state levels. In fact, this year, the school took pride being chosen to host the annual state conference for the science team.

The largest organization at A.C.H.S. is The Fighting Coyote Band, consisting of approximately 200 students, and ranked among the top twenty in the state of Texas. Many of these students have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement courses. In fact, Amistad’s A.P. program is one of the
leading programs in the Valley and state. The curriculum currently offers advanced courses in calculus, history, science, economics, English, and Spanish. The Master Minds team, comprised of students ranked at the top of most of these A.P. classes, traditionally make the quarter finals, and have won several regional competitions in The Rio Grande Valley.

Most people in the Valley hold Amistad City High School with high esteem because of its strong academic programs, which are often publicized in local newspapers and news stations when students excel in competitive events. However, residents of Amistad City also recognize the school's current problems spawned by a drastic increase in student enrollment. For the most part, parents seem satisfied with the ways school administrators are handling those problems.

The Students: Economic, Cultural, and Social Environment

Amistad City High School has been identified as a Title 1/Chapter I school, meaning it receives federal funding for compensatory education services to at-risk children because it is a school in a disadvantaged community. The latest district report for 1996-1997 shows of 2454 students enrolled, 1897 students are "economically disadvantaged"—that's 77.3% of the student body, and 25.8% of these students are also classified LEP (Limited English Proficient). Remarkably, poverty has not quelled the desires of the majority of graduates from pursuing a college degree. Last year, 80.7% of the senior class reported they were planning to attend college. Of this majority, 45.1% had advanced seals on their transcripts indicating their acceptance to either a community college or a university. Of almost 2500 students enrolled in 1995-1996, 77 students dropped out of school.

Racially, the distribution among students this year is 94.8% Hispanic, 5.0% White, 0.1% African American, and 0.1% Other. This distribution is comparative
to other Rio Grande Valley schools. A breakdown of students enrolled by program in the district report shows 56.3% are placed in Career and Technology Education, 25.6% are enrolled in Bilingual/ESL education, 15.0% are identified as Gifted and Talented, and 9.4% take Special Education classes. Students are separated socially due to programs, ability groupings, and class divisions. Based on my observations and conversations with my case study participants, I discovered, socially, students fall into one of three categories: "preps," "regulars," or "gangsters."

The preps generally consist of students who take Honors and GT classes, are involved in numerous extracurricular activities, have high GPAs, and are most likely to benefit academically from high school. They are on the college-bound track and generally have positive school experiences. Preps vary the most when it comes to dress, interests, and concepts of style. Thus, preps may include students who wear boot-cut Wrangler jeans, belt buckles, ropers, and long-sleeved Polo shirts to school; students who sport baggy jeans, oversized t-shirts, and Doc Martins; or students who show off their latest popular classic look of the 1990s—girls with knit crop-tops, Capri pants, and square healed, open-toed sandals, boys with classic V-neck sweater vests, white Gap t-shirts, Dockers, and loafers.

Most preps have stylish haircuts that coincide with the times. Girbaud, Calvin Klein, and Pepe designer jeans, Yaga t-shirts, athletic shoes by Nike, Reebok, and other name brands are popular with these teens who are quite fashion conscious. This group tend to have middle to upper class socioeconomic status and a stronger command of English than Spanish. Although most preps understand Spanish, they do not speak it very much, if at all, despite the fact most are of Mexican descent.
The regulars are students who take Advanced or Regular courses and are less involved in extracurricular activities that involve academic competition, such as prose and poetry interpretation, debate, ready writing, or number sense. They are more likely to join the school band or vocational organizations such as FHA (Future Homemakers of America), FFA (Future Farmers of America), VICA (Vocational Institutional Clubs of America), DECA (Distributive Educational Clubs of America) and ROTC (Reserved Officers Training Corps). Some regulars are active in sports which requires they keep a passing average.

Regulars are on the vocational, or technical, career track and appear to get less positive recognition in school overall than the preps. This group is easy to overlook in school culture because most regulars do not stand out as being particularly talented or unique. Other than taking their classes and participating in one or two extracurricular activities, regulars are not as heavily involved in the school's culture as are preps. Moreover, regulars in Advanced courses are more likely to get involved in school organizations than those in Regular.

In terms of dress, fewer regulars wear trendy designer clothes, but they generally dress in contemporary styles that are less expensive. Most of the time, males and females wear t-shirts, jeans, and athletic shoes to school. However, some of the same kinds of clothing that preps wear are also worn by regulars; they are just worn less often. As a whole, the young women in this group tend to wear their hair long, and the men wear it short.

Gangsters are commonly enrolled in the lowest ability courses or Regular courses. Most of these students are considered "trouble makers" or "discipline problems" partly because many actually have poor behavioral school records and/or police records. Another reason gangsters have a negative reputation is due to negative associations people make when they think of gangs. Significantly, some gangsters at Amistad High are not actual gang members; they
simply have friends who are in gangs and are considered gangsters by association.

Gangsters wear distinctive clothing. Males and females wear oversized pants that hang low (just under the hips), long-sleeved shirts buttoned only at the collar so their white or colored t-shirt (symbolic of their particular gang affiliation or association) is clearly seen. Shirts are sometimes tucked in, sometimes not (dress code requires boys to tuck in their shirts). Most male gangsters who are gang members wear a tattoo somewhere on their body, but most often on the top of one or both hands, between their forefinger and thumb. Some boys let their nails grow long and hard so that they may use them in gang fights, and they wear rings that look like brass knuckles. These teens often wear gold jewelry with pendants shaped as guns, crucifixes, dollar signs, girlfriend's names, or marijuana leaves. Males often have most, or all, of their hair shaved very close to the scalp--about 1/4 inch all around. They wear polished, black Stacey shoes and walk around school with an air of confidence.

Female gangsters often wear pale foundation on their face, use black, liquid eyeliner, and apply deep red, or brown, lipliner and lipstick. Hair is usually worn long, is permed, and combed high on the top (from about three inches and higher) to form a "cópete" or coif that is teased and sprayed heavily with hair spray. These girls often have small tattoos on their temples, or they shave their eyebrows and pencil them in. Male and female gangsters primarily speak in Spanish at school, take Regular classes, and perform poorly academically. Although some male and female gangsters can read and write at grade level, most are semi-literate. Many end up repeating the same grade for one or more years and eventually drop out of school. Attending Amistad City High is viewed primarily as an opportunity to socialize with friends and to organize
gang activity. Most gangsters are apathetic about school in general and are simply buying their time until they are old enough to quit.

**The Teachers: Social, Economic, and Cultural Environment**

Fieldnote: 8/15/95

I get a real sense of community with these teachers. Lots of hugs and warm greetings. Almost makes me wish I had taught here instead of Stephen F. Austin High School!

The faculty at Amistad City High is very friendly. I met so many people who just came up to me and introduced themselves, like Juanita, a petite, fair-skinned, Spanish teacher. One introduction led to many more! Have several invitations to "visit classrooms anytime!" I am so excited to get started.

From the start, the administrators, teachers, office staff and students that I met were friendly, hospitable, and respectful of my role as a researcher. Two characteristics that struck me as salient about the personnel at Amistad City High were the balanced distribution of male and female faculty and staff, and the sharply uneven racial composition, made up of mostly Mexican Americans. A district report confirmed my observations. It notes 38.8% of the teachers, teacher aides, and administrators at Amistad City High School are Hispanic males; 37.2% are Hispanic females; 15.6% are White females; 8.9% are White males; and 1.0% are identified as Other females. Notably, this racial composition is quite typical of this particular region in Texas. Most of the teachers, 30.4%, are seasoned professionals with 11-20 years of teaching experience and an average income of $38,843. 74.1% of the faculty, as a whole, hold a bachelor's degree and 59.2% teach regular education courses.

As in most large high schools, Amistad faculty members tend to socialize mostly with teachers in their departments or particular areas of study. Typically,
younger, less experienced teachers socialize with other first, second, and third year teachers, while more seasoned teachers generally associate with those who have been teaching for a much longer period of time. It is apparent, however, that all of the teachers share a common interest in promoting the best education possible for their students and work well together when administrators ask them to do so.

Narrowing the study is essential in case study research (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 1988; and others), so I chose to work with only a few ninth grade English teachers because they are more likely to provide opportunities for students to reflect about and share their own experiences as they relate to literature. I expected to learn about students in a naturalistic sense by paying close attention to the ways that students make sense of, connect with, and/or resist literature and literary activities. Additionally, writing assignments in English classrooms illuminate students' worldviews, revealing much about their self-concepts and academic abilities. Negotiating my role as a participant observer would allow me to casually get to know students and begin to narrow down my choices for case study participants after a few months of fieldwork.

Cooperating Teachers: First Impressions/First Interviews

The first teacher I interviewed was Mrs. Chavana, a Mexican American woman in her mid-forties who teaches Honors and Gifted & Talented English. Several distinctive qualities best describe Mrs. Chavana including her sincerity, warmth, intellect, and positive attitude. Mrs. C, as her students call her, was the first teacher to invite me to observe her classes who was sincerely interested in my research aims. She is truly a wonderful teacher who has high expectations for her students and genuinely loves her job. At the time I gained access, she was beginning her tenth year as a secondary English teacher. During a year of
weekly visits to her class, she was always prepared, animated, cheerful, and raring to get started—qualities that are essential for Honors and GT students who can be overly concerned with their GPAs than they are with learning to expand their horizons.

Mrs. Chavana admitted teaching her Advanced Placement courses required a different kind of energy than teaching lower ability groups—energy that challenged her intellectual capacities and helped her grow as a teacher and a scholar. In my fieldnotes, I noted Mrs. C used more sophisticated vocabulary than the other teachers, and her way of facilitating a respectful, orderly classroom environment also set her apart from the others. Mrs. C's behavior management plan is also noteworthy. Given her high expectations for all her students, evident in the curriculum and in the way she managed her classroom, students had no time for goofing off. Mrs. C's chalkboard typically showed a variety of different projects and activities were in progress simultaneously; consequently, time management skills and self-motivation were essential if students wanted to pass her class. The following are data from my participant observation fieldnotes that reveal much about Mrs. Chavana's attitudes about, and expectations for, her students.

Fieldnotes: 10/3/95
- Test (vocabulary)
- Read "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" (fiction) p. 3
- Read from Hunger of Memory p. 533 (non-fiction/autobiography)
- Be prepared to discuss tomorrow.
- Novel: Great Expectations: Final Draft Essay, Due Friday.

Fieldnotes: 9/26/95
I noticed that Mrs. C has very well-behaved classes. They brought in their novels to read today while some of the students went to the National Hispanic Institute session at the library... When I went to the session, I noticed two students from Mr. C's class volunteered to participate in an impromptu debate in front of a small audience of peers and the NHI representatives. These students take initiative and are poised when
speaking before groups of people—characteristics I see Mrs. C fosters in the opportunities for oral communication and critical thinking that she customarily provides her students...

What follows here is a *vignette* I crafted—"a shorter narrative that usually covers a more limited aspect of a participant's experience" (Seidman, 1991, p. 91). In this case, the vignette displays Mrs. Chavana's opinions about teaching Honors and GT English, data I obtained during our first interview:

You usually notice that the GT kids are a little more verbal. I like that. I like especially when we do our literature units and we're talking about great books—stories, for example, that kind of focus in on interpretation and evaluative types of responses. They're very good about getting into discussion, strong discussion,—even debating and voicing their opinions, which is usually found in the GT group. They're a little more expressive...

The Honors kids, you have to work with them more. But they're... Both groups are very task-oriented and I, that, I like. I've also taught Regular students and I see the difference and you have to work a little harder with the Regular students. And these upper level kids, they're, you know, self-motivated. So it's easier. It's just easier to be their teacher...

At risk? I think of distracters. When I talk to kids about... what causes distraction, I always mention that there are just distracters in life that come in the way of them doing whatever they want to do. Whether it be being Valedictorian or being in the top 10% of the class, or whatever it is that they need to take care of...

For the past three years, I've been showing Maya Angelou's taped discussion on the Oprah show. I don't know if you caught that?... And she talks about... I think she uses the analogy of ducks that are pecking at you. And that they constantly peck at you, and she says that you need to get rid of people that are like ducks that are constantly pecking at you, whether they be the people that criticize you in life or the people that get in the way. But that you just need to, you know, just ignore them and just move on with life. And so, I show it to them at the beginning of the year, simply because we've read her novel. And because she's just such a motivational speaker and she talks about being very strong in your own personal self-esteem. And just going on with ignoring people around you, not to let them bring you down. And I think at this level, especially, the kids have a lot of those things in the way of peer pressure.
Mrs. Chavana believed Honors and GT students were just as likely to experience distracters in their lives that would put them "at-risk" as Regular or Advanced students. I asked her to identify the high achievers in her Honors class, and Lupita Garza's name came up third. I had been considering her as a possible case study participant based on my observations, interactions, and her responses to the questionnaire. Mrs. Chavana confirmed some basic information regarding Lupita's home life, her performance in her class, and her personality, and, together, we agreed Lupita would be a wonderful case study participant.

At the time of this first teacher interview, I had already narrowed down my case study selection to two students in the GT class as well, and I questioned Mrs. Chavana about them. Together, we concluded Rachel Longoria would be a good choice because she fit the criteria of having multiple at-risk characteristics, and she ranked at the top ten percent of her class. We also agreed Skye Connoly was another good choice because she was very intelligent, had numerous at-risk characteristics, yet lately, was not handling her work load very well. Mrs. Chavana expressed her concern, saying she had trouble getting in touch with Skye's mother and made little progress in reaching Skye. Moreover, Mrs. C finally convinced me to consider Skye as a participant because she felt Skye truly needed to confide in an adult other than a teacher or counselor, as Skye seemed distrustful of them.

The week before the Thanksgiving holidays, I asked Lupita if she was interested in participating and she eagerly said yes. We exchanged phone numbers and made arrangements to meet with her parents, discuss the study, and get their permission for her to participate. Rachel's reaction was quite different from Lupita's. She was utterly surprised to have been chosen to participate. Sensing she needed more time to think about it, I told her to do so during the Christmas holidays, and to discuss it with her parents. When I saw
her in the classroom in January, she agreed and we made arrangements to meet with her mother for our initial visit. Mrs. Chavana was right about Skye, who immediately said yes to participating in the study. She immediately gave me her mother’s work number so I could make arrangements for our initial visit, but asked me not to give it to anyone employed at the school, explaining that her mother “doesn’t want the school to have her number.”

Mrs. Lennon, an Anglo-American teacher in her late forties, was the second English teacher I interviewed. She taught Advanced Freshman English, and was in her thirteenth year of teaching. Prior to teaching high school English, Mrs. Lennon was an academic counselor for ten years, and her personality and teaching style reflected this earlier profession. For instance, I noticed Mrs. Lennon’s instruction was most effective during individual conferencing with students than in leading class discussions or other whole class activities. In this situation, she was caring, patient, sincere, and attentive. Her students benefited most with this type of one-on-one instruction, but these opportunities were few and far between.

The Advanced section I was able to observe was her sixth period class, which followed the students’ lunch hour, and resulted in a considerably more chatty, energetic, and social group than Mrs. Lennon’s other sections. Consequently, Mrs. Lennon admitted, behavior management was her most challenging task with these students. Despite Mrs. Lennon’s abilities to provide explicit instructions and clear expectations to her class as a whole, she routinely had problems getting the entire class’s attention or facilitating an activity without losing her patience or appearing to be worn out:

9/28/95
Open your book to a story called “The Most Dangerous Game”, it’s the story after Walter Mitty... [lots of noisy students, not paying attention].
Students this class is big. [louder] You have to pay attention so turn around and let's get started... Are there any questions? Okay, I don't want any talking please. You need to do this on your own... Class if you have a question, you have to raise your hand... Let's get all get our work done... Girls! Put your lolly pops away!

Mrs. Lennon's curriculum was text-driven and teacher-centered during the nine months I observed her class, which only made behavior management problems worse. Assignments were isolated, as opposed to thematic, emphasizing content instead of critical analysis. There were no opportunities for cooperative learning or group projects either. Students reacted to Mrs. Lennon's traditional teaching methods loudly; in other words, they were typically socializing with peers and ignoring the teacher, sarcastic, bored, and disrespectful. What's more, students frequently cheated during tests. The following two excerpts are observational notes and comments to illustrate these instances:

10/5/95
I see one student is obviously looking at another student's paper with that student's obvious consent.

"Students any talking and you get a zero... Class, listen to me! Listen!"

Mrs. Lennon is so tired. Her students do not pay attention to her instructions. Way too much chatter during test. I feel like taking over... But I doubt, I'd do any better....

I've asked Mrs. Lennon if I could monitor the class to deter cheating and she gave me the green light.

10/26/95
The test is a workbook test. It has a section entitled "Thinking about the Section" (multiple choice), "Analyzing the Dilemma" (matching), "Analyzing Solutions" (fill in the blank) and "Using Context Clues" (matching). There are twenty questions in all and none requires writing.
They also had a vocabulary check test with vocabulary words from the story.

Mrs. Lennon does not monitor during tests. She is using Pledge to clean her work area. Her chalkboards are very clean, like new. Her room is organized. Artistic posters on the walls, pottery and plants on the bookshelves. Books stacked neatly and orderly. This is definitely her classroom. Still no sample student papers or projects on the bulletin boards or on walls at all. I’m going to monitor now.

Despite Mrs. Lennon’s obvious challenges with Advanced students, she still found teaching her students enjoyable. Her views of at-riskness are aligned with Mrs. Chavana’s to the extent that both teachers view every student as being vulnerable to risk. However, Mrs. Lennon suggests the school’s "unofficial" grading policy increases the chances of more students getting through high school undereducated and underprepared for adult life. She offers her opinions on such matters in the following vignette:

I like teaching Advanced level students because they have more skills, and they come to you with more ability basically. And they’re more interested in learning and more easy... I tell you, I have everything from truly committed students in there to the bottom of commitment. And I have several students in there that have emotional, a lot of emotional problems. I don’t know exactly what they are yet, but I know I have several...

I think they have just generalized [the term at-risk] into anybody that has any kind of problem that is at-risk. In fact, everybody has some kind of problem, so except for the very, very top students, that if they have no personal home problems, they wouldn’t be considered at risk if they are not failing anything. Almost everybody else is. I even consider people who aren’t being at-risk, if they have emotional problems [to be at-risk]. Because now at days, you have to pass everybody anyway... I give them all six weeks to make up the work. That they missed. And it’s generally zeros that pull them down because I give a test, if they flunk it, it doesn’t matter because I count it once and I give them a lot of other work. And I give them a lot of grades, like fifteen, fifteen grades. So I give them every chance not to fail...

You have to pass everybody. You cannot fail more than 20%, even if all of the students have. Even if they have all zeros, even if they never came to
school, or for whatever reason, you're not allowed to fail anywhere near 20% and they've been talking to us about why we're failing with that many. I'm wondering why some people fail zero students, and some people, you know, fail more than that. So a lot of pressure is put on you; you can't really go by grades anymore... So people are being passed right and left...

I asked Mrs. Lennon about two students in particular, Jaisa Zapata and Mary Palacios. According to her, Jaisa had a sad story of emotional problems stemming from her home life:

She seems to be a sweet girl, and she is. I mean she dresses gang style to begin with. But I don't think she's a gang member. Maybe she is, I don't know, but [she's] very intelligent... But emotionally and physically withdrawn? She just can't sit down and do her work. She just can't do it. I mean she has to get up and she just craves attention. I give her any kind of attention and she just eats it up. I had her sitting in the back when I had them seated alphabetically, and she made sure she ended up here in the front. She wants to be right by me. She's a very interesting person. I'll know more about her by the end of the year...

I don't think she has a mother around. She told me she lives with her father; he's going to school and working and she said he's having a lot of problems. And I've called her at home several times and I always get her late at night. And she says they are not there. And they have a machine where you can tell who has called. And she says, "Mrs. Lennon, you've called so many times!"...

Mary? She's a very hard worker with high grades. I don't know much about her since she is a high achiever. I know less about the achievers than the non-achievers! I don't know much about these kids because they never give me any trouble (laughing)...

I decided to ask both girls to be in the study because they had several at-risk characteristics, were among the most intelligent in this class, and had the potential to surpass their current level of achievement. I talked to them together outside of class in the hallway, and they seemed flattered to have been asked to
participate. We made the necessary arrangements for meeting their parents (both girls lived with their fathers, who were both divorced) for our initial visits.

Mrs. Alvarez, a Mexican American woman, was beginning her third year of teaching Regular ninth grade students when this study began. In her mid-twenties, Mrs. Alvarez, had a personable and friendly demeanor, and was generally liked by her students who were in a pilot program for at-risk students. Unfortunately, being liked sometimes has its price. Mrs. Alvarez paid for it frequently with disrespectful and disruptive students who made her job quite hard on her:

Fieldnotes: 10/12/95

The way some of the students speak to Mrs. Alvarez is so disrespectful. Today, she has some basic parts of speech and their functions listed on the transparency and they are supposed to take notes as she reviews these. They literally shout from their desks. "Esta nojada la Miss ya!" [She's already angry, the teacher!] brags one student. These students know they wear down the teacher’s patience. They enjoy this class because they get away with murder. "Ay, casi nada mujer!" [Ay that’s hardly anything woman!— in a sarcastic tone]. "We’re flunkies and you’re expecting us to do harder work?" says Gabriel. "You don’t even explain it to us!" complains Rosa. "Miss! We’ve already done this!" Juan exclaims exasperated. "Andale Miss. Vajale pronto" [Hurry Miss, lower it (the transparency)] orders Lisa...

Journal Entry: 10/12/95

One of the things that is getting on my nerves is the level of disrespect these kids have for their teacher. She’s only been teaching two years, so I understand her frustration with being assigned to students who need so much attention, preventing her from teaching more effectively. Mrs. Alvarez does not ever raise her voice though. Her feathers rarely get ruffled. This I admire; however, these students say anything they want in this class, whenever they want, because they know they will have at least one or two verbal warnings before they get sent to the office. They are not phased by "getting into trouble." It’s just another day to them. I do not feel
it is my place to step in when things start to get out of control. It's not. But I do feel these kids are trying to see what I will do on some level. It's kind of a performance. I will not interfere of course. It's hard, but I cannot interfere.

Mrs. Alvarez often let unruly behavior go, choosing to pick her battles instead. She handled more serious disruptions in the following ways: first, she calmly gave them a verbal warning; second, if the behavior continued, she warned them again or talked to them privately just outside the classroom; a third outburst resulted in a write up and a trip to the principal's office. A good behavior management in theory, but ineffectual for students who were not bothered by negative attention or reprimands.

The purpose of the team teaching program was to prevent at-risk students from failing their freshman year. Several cohorts of Regular freshmen who met criteria (such as having failed one or more sections of the T.A.A.S. tests during their 8th grade year, had poor attendance, and a history of poor academic performance) were identified and places in classes that were taught by a core group of teachers. This group of teachers met with one another everyday during an extra conference period to discuss their mutual students' progress and problems, keep each other updated on their content curriculum, communicate with parents when necessary, and collaborate as a team to create intervention strategies for helping students succeed in their classes. The administration openly identified these students by naming them "Team Hope." The following vignette illustrates Mrs. Alvarez's early impressions about the project:

Yes, last year I had a few scattered at-risk students. They tried to pass because the others were passing. This year, it's still a regular program, but we're way behind. It makes a big difference when you put a whole bunch of at-risk students together. Everything goes a lot slower. You can't switch from activity to activity like you used to. They whine. They're very expressive, whereas, the other classes— they were more submissive. And these kids, they're just so frank...
To me, these kids are labeled at-risk because they have problems at home. And they never have the support at home to do good in anything. So they don't. Because it's not expected at home, they come to school and "Why should I do it? My parents don't expect me to, so why do you expect me to?" To me, that's at-risk. All these kids in here have a story. All of them have something, you know? And you have to put that behind you and go on. Some of them will accept that, but the rest, there's no way. I don't know how to reach them...

I have already explained to them they are not here for those reasons [because they are troublemakers]. They're here because we're concerned that they are not going to pass to the next grade. "And we're helping you. You're receiving more help from us than you would if you were with another teacher"...

See these kids—let's say they were scattered around with other teachers, they would probably fail. They would probably fail because their teacher would not spend the time. The student would not ask the teacher for work [anything]. They would fail. So they took all the hard-core students out and they gave them to us. And they expect us to make them pass. And I think we're doing-- if we get half of them to pass, I think we're doing an excellent job. Because you have to look at it from that point of view. I've had students in the past where they would not do the work. They would not do it, three or four of them, so they failed. Those are the ones I have now. What's the difference?

As the previous fieldnotes indicate, Mrs. Alvarez began teaching grammar early in the school year. Her lesson plans also included daily journal entries, vocabulary development (mostly worksheets) and spelling. By the end of the first grading period, students had 26 assignments. Exhausted so early in the year, Mrs. Alvarez asked me, "What am I doing wrong?" I told her I thought her classroom demeanor was good. She showed a great deal of restraint when students tested her patience and she was never disrespectful to her students despite many of their insults and direct hostility toward her. However, I also told her I would develop lessons that were thematic and that were interdisciplinary. "Bring in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in real and meaningful ways and for real and meaningful purposes," I suggested, "and get
together with the other block teachers and develop thematic units that tie the literature they read here to the other subjects, like science, history, and math." I also told her to get the students to write journal entries everyday on topics that refer to the literature they are reading and that draw connections to their everyday lives.

We talked some more and she came up with some good ideas like getting the students to copy the lyrics of a favorite song (in either Spanish or English), to analyze it in writing, play it on a cassette player or CD, draw an illustration representing the song, and present their interpretation in front of the class. This activity was somewhat a success inasmuch as her students cared about it and most of them actually did it. However, few of them presented it in front of the class because they were afraid to be ridiculed, so they didn't receive any credit for this component of the grade. Mrs. Alvarez was still teaching things in a rather disconnected, arbitrary fashion, and she continued to do so until the end of the year.

The teaming approach was not working because these teachers did not seem to have an understanding of the philosophy behind it, or the way it is designed to work. I doubted the principal did either, and if she did, why would she have lumped students performing at the lowest levels together? (see Merenbloom, 1991, The Team Process). There were few good days, and mostly bad ones where students were either rowdy or sleepy, whining or snoring, or a mixture of all these things. It became all too clear that about three quarters of Mrs. Alvarez's class was unchallenged, unmotivated, and basically just going through the motions of life in school. Most of them already decided everyone on Team Hope was a flunky, a troublemaker, a dummy, or a loser. As one student put it, "We're flunkies Miss, and you're making us work harder?"
So many complaints. Mrs. Alvarez explains the content, but some do not pay attention. Then they ask questions about topics she has already addressed. Lots of rowdiness and laughter in this class. The kids are all obviously friends. One girl, Annabel catches my eye. She’s wearing an ROTC uniform, dark army green pants, light green shirt, a green hat, and shiny black shoes. She complains as much as the others, "Miss why do you give us so much work? Ay Miss! how much more?", but she isn’t disrespectful, just seems to want Mrs. Alvarez’s attention. She seems to enjoy the fact that Mrs. Alvarez expects them to learn the parts of speech, their functions, and how to identify them in sentences. I’m going to ask about her today.

Annabel, interested me more than anyone else in the class because of her tendency to talk about her life to everyone in the class and her constant references about "getting out of this team":

Fieldnotes—Annabel’s comments on 10/19/95:

Miss, I got a 6 on my Algebra test. I showed it to my father. He said to try to do better... Miss, I’m not going out with that guy Miss.... Miss, my father wants to send me to that school [alternative] for bad kids. I told him, "Send me! I don’t care!"... Miss, I beat up on my sister. She’s a skinny ol’ thing (laughing)... Miss, I’m gonna tell my father to get me out of this team. I’m not a troublemaker...

When I got a chance to talk to Mrs. Alvarez about Annabel, I discovered she was ranked third in the class, with a high B average, and Mrs. Alvarez perceived her as a successful student in the class because she was a good reader, she cared about her work, and she kept up with all of her assignments. Through Mrs. Alvarez, I learned Annabel was a member of the school band, drama, and ROTC. Annabel came from a poor family and seemed to go through phases where she noticeably "tries to pick herself up" through laughter. Mrs. Alvarez noted "most of these kids are, or have been, on probation or in jail, and many do drugs." She
did not know if Annabel had a record, but noted that she did associate with a local gang and was assigned to I.S.S. (In School Suspension) every once in a while for not showing up to detention (mostly assigned because of repeated tardiness). Needless to say, I was intrigued. I asked Annabel to be my case study participant during a field trip to a local museum late November and she agreed:

Fieldnotes: 11/29/95
Annabel smiled when I asked her if she was interested in being a case study participant, but she never gave me eye contact. I think she was happy about it, but didn't want to let on in front of her friends. "Will you think about it? Talk to your parents and let me know next week?" I asked. "Yeah, okay Miss," she said and walked back to be with her friends. Annabel is clearly the most popular with her peer group. Everyone wants to sit by her in the bus, to walk with her at the museum.

Data Analysis: A Whole Mind Activity
Judi Marshall (1981) describes data analysis as a "whole mind activity" that needs a great deal of attention, demands a lot of mental space, and requires large chunks of time (p. 397):

Whilst at the beginning of analysis, I plod, and have to try and have to sit down and concentrate, and attempt things more slowly, when things begin to tick, I don't have to try and sustain this kind of attention anymore, it's quite independent of any sort of surface activity. It's almost a feeling that I can direct my surface activity but I can't direct the other forms of attention, that they come in and start getting involved with what I'm doing at the surface and start speeding it up. (p. 398)

Marshall's depiction of data analysis as a "whole mind activity" mirrored my own process. In determining ways the participants in this study view themselves in school, at home, and with peers, and how their self-concepts and coping strategies affect their academic performance, I continually had to consider related aspects such as life experiences, stressful events, culture, gender, age, etc., and glean from the perspectives of other significant people in the girls' lives such as
teachers and parents. An awesome task indeed! The idea of developing nested case studies as a framework for data display in conjunction with creating vignettes and profiles was an intentional effort to reduce interview transcripts into a manageable form, while also combining relevant fieldnotes, journal entries, and data from documents to form more holistic, triangulated, case studies.

Following I.E. Seidman's (1991) data analysis process, which includes creating profiles and vignettes, making thematic connections, and interpreting and analyzing the material (see Appendix E), allowed me to report what I saw, heard, and felt. In essence, immersing myself in data analysis enabled me to be comfortable as the research instrument in this study, and to realize my bias as a researcher is as valuable as it is inevitable. As Judi Marshall (1981) eloquently describes below:

Because my feeling of rightness is important, my feeling that this is what I can do, it's my translation, what I have found, and interpreted from the data. My bias is something I appreciate, it's part of me as a researcher. And while it is important for me and for others to recognize my bias, it really is what I can give as a researcher, it is my contribution, and it's coherent and it's felt and has all these other qualities which make me value it more than a detached attempt to be objective. I work from a particular position. I appreciate other positions, and I feel that each has its own integrity and its own validity. (p. 399)

**Making Thematic Connections: Preliminary Interpretation and Analysis**

Several themes emerged from data obtained during early fieldwork that focused on teachers and classroom cultures including the following:

1. The teachers genuinely cared about their students' personal well-being and academic achievement.

2. The teachers had a high sense of responsibility concerning their power to help students achieve academic success in their classrooms.
3. The teachers felt pressured by administrators in the way of fostering success for all of their students, although this meant something different for each teacher.

Among the three teachers interviewed, Mrs. Chavana had the most fluid notion of the concept of at-risk, disagreeing with the more frequently held conception based on the epidemiological model. As discussed in Chapter 2, the epidemiological view assumes a student's at-risk status can be determined on the basis of "relatively stable enduring predispositions such as minority culture background, or generally agreed upon problem behaviors such as high absenteeism" (Richardson et al., 1989). As a teacher of higher level English courses, with teaching experience in Special Education as well as Regular English, Mrs. Chavana recognized all students are susceptible to risk when "distracters" get in the way of their goals. She was also the only teacher to invite opportunities for student reflection and discussion regarding distracters that could make them vulnerable to academic success. Her use of Oprah Winfrey's interview with the revered poet and author, Maya Angelou, is an example of teaching life skills, one of six steps to fostering resiliency in schools as identified by Henderson & Milstein (1996).

By contrast, Mrs. Lennon and Mrs. Alvarez saw the root of the at-risk problem as originating from outside the school. Specifically, Mrs. Lennon attributed at-risk characteristics to "personal home problems" or "emotional problems," while Mrs. Alvarez identified "lack of parental support" as a major risk factor. Interestingly, although both teachers had a high sense of responsibility for their students, neither attributed student learning or behavior problems directly to themselves (e.g., ineffective teaching styles, low expectations, or lack of teaching experience).
None of the teachers attributed a student's lack of success to a characteristic inherent in that student (such as minority cultural background or socioeconomic status), nor did they place the blame on schools per se. However, follow-up teacher interviews revealed they were critical of ability grouping due to the negative effects labeling and segregation have on students, especially those denied opportunities to interact with their better prepared peers. The teachers were equally concerned that poor students (most whose first language is not English) were customarily assigned to the lowest level courses early in life and tracked to stay there. Finally, the teachers in this sample believed ability group labeling affected all students' self-concepts; mainstreaming students with mixed abilities was more equitable; and schools awarded teachers with more years of experience by assigning them to higher level courses. The following excerpts are noteworthy:

Mrs. Alvarez, excerpt from second interview— 4/2/96:

The way they did it with ours this year was just awful. Because they gave us, as I've mentioned before, all the at-risk students together in one classroom. And just sitting there, you can tell when you walk in, it's "Oh Gosh!" A very different atmosphere from the other classrooms. And I think tracking these types of students, it would be better to place them, advance them—maybe two or three— and track them that way. Assign a teacher to those three students, make sure she keeps an eye on those three students and expect more out of them, instead of less.

Mrs. Lennon, excerpt from second interview— 4/2/96:

I really don't think I like it. It's really popular in the Valley. I don't know, maybe all of Texas, but I think it's bad because the kids are tracked from the time they're in first grade. They stay with each other all the way up.... I see that maybe the top students benefit from the tracking ... But I don't think anybody else does because lower [ability] students need to be around and hear more ideas... They're just not around it and so they never learn it. And they have no idea where they stand in the world. They have no idea....

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Mrs. Chavana, excerpt from second interview— 4-2-96:

I don't know that maybe we are harming kids when we identify the college bound kids. And then we have kids that are mainly pro-vocational more than all the other. Cause I think that maybe to some degree we hurt them in a sense that we— you know, making the division too fine a division. And then maybe in that sense.... Because, you know, it's a disadvantage to them because I wonder if we didn't push, or if we didn't get rid of the lower level programs like we are doing now. But the kids won't come up to the level that they're supposed to.... So I think what would help is to get more of those kids mainstreamed and having them mixed in with the others. Because I think the higher level kids would bring out that good in them or kind of push them up to that level...

Although my expectations that identity constructions in school, or labeling, would affect self-concepts of students in classrooms were confirmed, I was amazed to discover the extent to which classroom cultures (characterized by different levels of teacher experience and expectations, the content curriculum, teaching styles, student social identities, and student behavior) reinforced student's perceptions of who they were, how they should act, and what they could be in school, and in life. Donald Polkinghorne's (1988) conception of "the self as a construction" comes to mind here. He maintains "the human disciplines attribute the development of the notion of personal identity and the self to symbolic and bodily interaction with the social environment" (p. 150). The self is "a construction built on other people's responses and attitudes toward a person and is subject to change as these responses, inherently variable and consistent, change in their character" (p. 150). To come to a "unified and concordant self concept," a person needs to synthesize and integrate the diverse social responses he or she experiences (p. 150).

Students identify with, and are directly influenced by, the people around them. The classroom cultures I observed were distinctly different from one another and strongly affected every student, especially in terms of self-concept
and quality of academic achievement. Polkinghorne's (1988) illuminating explanation of "self as a construction," helps explain how these students saw themselves as strikingly different from students enrolled in higher or lower courses. For example, several students in the Regular English class thought they were part of the "Team Hope" project because they were troublemakers or dummies, and they often acted as such by actually getting into trouble, refusing to do classwork or homework, refusing to study for tests, and giving up easily when they were confused or did not understand a class assignment. Similarly, despite their lack of challenging or stimulating class activities and low teacher expectations, students in the Advanced English class appeared to be satisfied with their label, generally doing what was minimally required to pass, or average quality work.

In order to have the privilege of maintaining Honors status, these students seemed to expect that they would have to push themselves intellectually and to perform at high levels of achievement. They were the hardest-working students I saw at A.C.H.S., and most were careful not to overextend themselves by taking on too many extracurricular activities. The Gifted & Talented students were similar to the Honors students in terms of their willingness to work harder, but seemed to expect more in the way of leniency. Since they viewed themselves as the movers and shakers of the school, they often expected to be entitled to certain privileges (such as extended deadlines for assignments).

In short, the social dynamics I observed at the school, and at school events, affected students' perceptions of themselves. Ability group labeling, coupled with social group affiliation, were so entrenched in students' self-concepts, each cohort of students seemed quite aware of the borders that made them feel "safe" with students like them, and "unsafe" with students unlike them.
Border crossing was a rare and unlikely event, and peers seemed to be the strongest deciding factor in the decision to work to achieve in school or drop out.

Even more disturbing is that, taken as a whole, these students seemed to loosely represent a microcosm of the larger culture. The preps, mostly enrolled in the Honors and Gifted & Talented classes, were analogous to the professional class of inhabitants of the Rio Grande Valley whose culture was most compatible with the school's, and thus, embraced its values, norms, and practices. The regulars were comparable to the larger working-class majority of border inhabitants, seemingly accustomed to cultural ambiguity, balancing home and school lives on a daily basis while being unable to "fit in" effortlessly in either world. Finally, the gangsters, reflected the lives of some of Amistad City's poorest residents. Prone to suspicion by fellow citizens and authorities who judge them harshly based on appearance and/or unwillingness to conform to dominant culture standards, they are perceived negatively as troublemakers and corrupters who must be separated from the rest.

The teachers reminded me of sympathetic border patrol agents, who didn't make the rules, or necessarily agree with them (i.e., identifying and segregating students with differing curriculums, positive and negative labels, and tracks), yet enforced these rules to sustain their livelihood. Finally, the school represented the borderland itself, "a vague and undetermined place" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3), where identity construction is in constant transition. A place where borders determine who is one of "us," who is one of "them," and reinforce patterns of success and failure (academic and otherwise) among, and between, its people.
Mary informed me that she was very interested in being part of this research project. She is a very serious young woman—sticks out in this Advanced section. She is extremely poised and polite, very petite (around 5'2" and 100 lbs.), and pretty. She has shoulder-length, sandy brown, straight hair, chocolate brown, almond shaped eyes, and olive skin. When I asked about her living situation, she told me that she will be living with her father after Thanksgiving. I told her I would not call him, or any of the other participants' parents, until after the holiday. "Okay," she said, "or you can call him at his fiancés house." I asked, "Is he getting married soon?" "Yes. My mom is getting married also." "That's great," I said, "So they will finally be happy?" "Yes," she said smiling brightly, "finally.'"...
tests (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) every year, which along with her grade point average and teacher recommendations, contributed to her placement in Advanced courses during her freshman year in high school.

An active participant in whole-class discussions, Mary seemed to enjoy responding to literature; in fact, she was one of the few students who seemed to enjoy reading in this Advanced English class:

Fieldnotes: 11/16/95

Mrs. Lennon's questions often begin with the following tags: Can you think of....? What do you think? What would you do? How would you feel?... Mary is one of the only students who takes risks. She answers the questions even though she is unsure if she is "right" and participates consistently in the class.

Mrs. Lennon: How many of you get punished and lectured at home? (pause—hands go up) Can parents be too strict? (collective, Yes!) Can people learn from getting lectured? How does the environment influence one's behavior?

Mary: (raises her hand to indicate that she gets punished and lectured) Yes. Different things determine punishment and lecture.... You can be in a poor environment and everybody around you can be all messed up, but if your parents bring you up right, you'll be all right.... Your friends can be a certain way, and you disagree, do you have the courage to say no? Yes!

During class observations, I noticed most students perceived Mary as one of the most intelligent in the class, often seeking her assistance with their class assignments. Mary exhibited a capacity to connect with literature in a thoughtful and critical manner. Her friendliness and caring personality made her a popular student with boys and girls in the class.

A child of divorced parents, Mary currently lives with her 37 year old father, Richard Palacios, her twin sister, Monica, her younger brother Ricky Jr. and her new extended family, step-mother Rita and step-sister Roxanna. Aside
from being a child of divorced parents, Mary had other factors that are generally attributed to risk such as her minority status and low educational attainment of one, or both, of her parents.

Although they are not wealthy, the Palacios family is not suffering economically. They live in a middle-class neighborhood, about three blocks from my apartment, in a contemporary Spanish style condominium which they rent. Mr. Palacios works at a local hardware store where he holds a managerial position. After my first home visit, I noted in my journal that the living room was neat, uncluttered, and clean. It had a pale blue color scheme and comfortable, modern furniture. The top of the big screen television set, the focal point of the spacious room, was adorned with the children's trophies. Mary had just placed 2nd at a speech tournament the week before. When I congratulated her, she brimmed with pride and satisfaction at her accomplishment.

The following profile stems from three interviews conducted in the Palacios home on three separate occasions during the spring semester of 1995. The data is presented in the order in which it came and begins with Mary's description of herself:

Well, for one thing, I'm a twin. And I enjoy drama. I live for drama and dance... I'm a perky person. And what else can I say about myself? I really don't have any enemies... I'm kind of cautious; it takes time for me to know [someone]. And kind of, more or less, trust [a person]. Cause of past experiences, it's a little hard to trust somebody...

Sometimes if someone is talking to me... in a high tone? I want to top their voice... Not drown it, but make my point clear. Not like yelling at them, more like at a higher tone?...

Like, I don't like being somewhere and not knowing no one. And so I make friends with everyone. But some of my friends really don't like that because like, you stop and chat with that person and you go on. And they really don't like that...
Well, the thing is on my mom's side, we're not close at all. And with my dad's fiancé, my family is so close and I love being around them. Cause they're always together, like they're always having barbecues and they're always together and I like that a lot. So I prefer being with her family... And my dad's family, they're the same way too, but I really prefer being with [Rita's] family because they're always together...

My parents are great parents. They push me to do a lot of stuff. Well, my mom wanted me to be a cheerleader, but I just never wanted to be one. Dancing was my thing. So she was still happy of what I made it for and all my accomplishments. My mom wants me to be in a lot of things. My dad, "Only what you can handle."... My mom thinks that what I'm in, it's barely, you know? And she wants me to be in more... I think that she wasn't in as many things that she wanted to be in when she was younger. You know when I was younger, you know how mothers want you to be in ballet, tap, gymnastics? You name it, I was in it... And I just dropped and just stayed in brownies. And then, it started all over again (laughs)...

My dad is like, "Next year, you can't be in this and this and this—just drama and dance team." But ohhh! I still want to be in more... I'd love to be in student council... He goes, "Next year, you have to calm down."... He feels like everything went down (grades) because of what I was in... [My father] is strict about about homework... Bedtime is 10:30... [He tries] to make it (work load) easy, but I try to make it harder...

In drama, I like to be the center of attention. I like it when you're there and you see the audience's faces and their reactions to your pieces. The reaction you want when they're like this (show's me a big enthusiastic smile). "I want more." It's like "I like this! I like this!"... Or (in drama) when you do all these different voices and they're amazed and it's like, "Ooh where is this coming from?" and like, I like that. I like it when you go up and you receive—they call you— that you win like second place and you place. I like walking up there and I get my trophy and I walk back down all proud and like it feels cool. I know it sounds conceited, but... I work pretty hard. That stage. I like being there. I enjoy the costumes that she (dance teacher) has us wear. We had some pretty looking costumes that she has us wear. We had some pretty stupid looking costumes when we did "Macho Man." So we were bald, buff, guys! Carrying little weights, so we looked pretty weird, but it was fun doing it... It depends how much you love it. It's the reason you're going to strive...

My mom hemorrhaged twice when we were in her, you know, no, three times!... And then, when we were younger, I got pneumonia and we were premature. And three months after being into this world, we developed
pneumonia— or something... But what I got in one lung— I'm not sure if it can go like that in one lung— but my sister got it in two. And so, right there, the doctor's like already like, "I don't think so." Cause we were like premature, so we lived in the hospital when we were younger. And so I was thinking just about my past in the hospital and stuff. I was thinking— it might sound weird, but I was supposed to be here on this earth for a purpose...

My parents got divorced when I was younger and I think that would be the only thing that's happened besides school grades and small-minded things... I also moved from my mother's house [because] it's less stressful here...

Have you ever heard of "cat scratch disease or fever"?... Well, when a kitten scratches you. I got a worse case of it and the cat scratched me cause I love animals... And I had 16 cats and plus more on the way!...

And little ones would just come and I would feed them and I was playing with a kitten and she scratched me and I got this— I don't know. All of a sudden, I had a large lump the size of a tangerine under my arm. It was large, terrible! And that was the first time— I was so excited because I made it for (dance team) officer my eighth grade year. And my sister was seventh grade year, second captain. And I followed her footsteps and I got her position as captain. And I wasn't able to enjoy my position. It was like the only summer and that's when it developed. And so I only got to perform once and then I had to go into surgery...

It was formed and the doctor didn't do the operation right and it came back but even worse. Where something inside the cyst leaked down to my stomach. And I got super sick and it got down to my stomach and I think I was in the process of dying...

And so finally I was in the hospital like for two weeks and a half and they didn't understand what was going on with me. So the doctors would tell my mom, you know, "Don't expect the best."... Until some doctor came and said, "I know what this is" and he said, "We'd better open her up and check what it is" and so he operated on me and said, you know,— "We need to send her to Corpus and they'll do better for her." I was there the first three days and they were already curing it... And I was like there (Amistad City Hospital) in the hospital for like two months! And I, me, I can barely stand being in the house for a whole day. Being in four walls for two months! So it was super hard for me— myself. So walking up and down the hallways did not help much. And then, I let go and I wouldn't walk anymore... I got real sick. I mean I went down to sixty pounds...
Right now. I'm thin, so and then plus like being sixty pounds! I went
down to sixty pounds, all the way down. Like, if I want to get— to let my
legs real skinny, then just let them go and they were like super, they
were like really skinny. And then, I felt bad cause I was feeling so sorry
for myself because I was there. And I looked around me. There were
people around me that I know that will never get better again, that they
were dying: And me, I'm getting better. So I tried to convince myself,
"I'm getting better! But they aren't. I shouldn't be feeling sorry for myself.
I'm going to be out of that hospital for like two weeks or a week. And
they'll never see a movie again or anything!"

[M]y mother stuck with me all that time. So that made a big difference...
and the staff there were so sweet to me... Since I was there so long, they
would always give me Sprite and chicken noodle soup, and if I see Sprite
or chicken noodle soup, ahhh!!! ... [T]he thing is it (the disease) can
reoccur again. And I'm so scared about that. It first started off with fevers
and stuff and every time I get like a sneeze or a cold or a fever, I think
about that. I tell my father, "I need to got to the doctor, now!"

[The way I cope with problems now] is that I hide it with my perkiness
and if it gets to me too much, you know, I'll let it out and I'll tell my
friends. They know when I'm sad. They can tell. [For emotional
support], I guess I go to my sister. She's around. She's always there...

The people that I hand around with are all good people— good in school,
active in school. And they all have good families, most of their parents
are together... In English, I wanted to do that (move up to Honors) for like
since the beginning. But I was scared. It took me a long time to move.
But then my grades themselves, they looked pretty high and a friend just
finally convinced me just for this semester, and if not, then next year, you
know?.. And so finally, by having my friend convince me, I went... I was
bored in [math]... So that one (regular), it was too slow and the people in
there! I felt real bad, but the people in there wouldn't pay attention to the
teacher...

And so, I wanted to go to people who I know would respect the teacher.
And at this, you know, in the advanced program, more people respect
him... I was just looking for the right time to do it. And this semester, it
was just right there. And then with the Christmas holidays, I thought
about it. I wanted to be in it. And well, English, it took me a while
because the thing is, it was easy and I was going at a good pace. But it
was easy. So it was like should I just lay low? Or should I move up? and
then when I got that 100 (on her report card), I thought, you know, "Well,
I should go up."...
In math... in the other class, if a student in the class didn't understand, I would help them. Now I'm the one that's getting the help and I don't like the way that feels (laughs). So now, I'm not going to be all stubborn about it. I'm gonna let them help me... In the other class, I didn't feel it (staying in such a basic class for her) was right. So like, "If they're going to move me to a different class anyways, to a regular, why don't I just go to an advanced?" And there was room in advanced, but the highest advanced there was!! (laughs)... It's just the teacher. She goes a little faster. I'm drowning in there, but I'm taking it... I don't think I will get an A; maybe a low B or maybe even a C... It's going to help me at the end of the year. We have a district test. In the regular, we did not go through half the stuff. and then, over here I felt more prepared for the TAAS. Because she's been over a lot of stuff. We're half way done with the book. In the other class, we're only a fourth down with the book...

When I have homework, I write myself a big note saying, "You have homework, so remind yourself." I normally have to force myself-- I know-- I think that, "Okay, what do I want to do when I grow up? Do I want to say 'Paper or Plastic' or do I want to have my own office with Mary Palacios written on top?" So I get to thinking, "Okay, I better do my homework!" And that's what I do. For studying, I can. That's a different story. I have no one way of studying. I just read or I have different ways. Or I see what helps one person and I'll try it... So I experiment-- like I tried flashcards. I tried studying a few weeks or a few days ahead. I've done a lot of stuff and see how it works... It depends on the subject, like in math, I've noticed cramming helps me. Otherwise I forget. Or I mix up two things together... I'll study-- cram the night before and I'll wake up early just to review. And then like every period I'll review some more...

In elementary, I had good grades. And then in junior high, I slacked off a whole lot with Cs and Bs. And then in high school, it's gone up... Now I'm just aiming high for a little award in dance team... the Super Scholastic Team... I just have to push myself...

I don't know about my academic standards. I would like to go to an Ivy League college, but if they won't take me-- Amistad City University. I don't know. I might go to ACU. Or if I would like to go to San Antonio... I don't know what I want to be yet, but I know I want to be someone high in life. I'd really love my own office with my name on the door. I don't know what I want to be, but I know that! (laughs) Before I'm married, I want a house of my own, under my name, a car under my name, and that's what I must have before I get married. So I plan to have that and then, just in case, if I get married and anything happens, I have that to fall back on. And then, if I have children, I'd have to be financially stable,
have a house with a backyard for them, and everything... My philosophy of life is—just if you fall down, pick yourself back up.

Mary had many other things to say that I was not able to fit into this report. She talked about how winning awards—"seeing that I've done good"—has given her confidence and promoted her self-esteem. I asked her and the other participants of this study about their views of drug use, racial prejudice and premarital sex and discovered Mary had a strong sense of what is good for her and what is not. For instance, Mary believes doing drugs "is bad... and a waste of time... it wouldn't fit in my schedule and that's just something that would mess you up." Her decision-making process is largely influenced by her father's opinions, as well as her peers' views. For example, she stated that if she did have the time to experiment, she wouldn't because "if my dad caught me, I would be in very big trouble... and another thing my friends don't do that... they are not the type of people that would do that."

Mary is "against being prejudiced," but acknowledges that although "everybody is slightly prejudiced," she's not "that prejudiced." As a Catholic, Mary believes in sex after marriage. She believes God leads her in certain directions in life, but admits that she doesn't make that much time for God because she is involved "in so many things." She added, "I go to church on Sundays and I go to CCD, and right now I'm working to get my confirmation."

Parents and Home Life

Mary's father, Richard, admittedly "very old-fashioned," remembers his ex-wife's pregnancy with the twins as "normal" in every sense except that the twins were born premature. He said their mother "almost hemorrhaged, but did not" and that Mary's understanding of her birth story was based on what her
mother may have told her. Each child weighed at approximately 4 lbs. and each was a "crybaby":

They were both crybabies (laughs heartily)… until the age of three, I think. I tried to push them to get away from that habit and their mother wouldn't let me… that's when I realized that, you know, the woman is gonna take care of the girls, and if I ever have a son, which I did, I will be responsible for his upbringing…

The young Palacios family lived in an apartment until the girls turned three, and shortly after, they bought a house. Mr. and Mrs. Palacios divorced when Mary and Monica were 8 years old. The girls moved into their father's home during the Thanksgiving holiday of 1995, their freshman year of high school, because it was "less stressful" there. I asked Mr. Palacios what it was like to be a single father with two daughters to raise.

I mean I was used to living alone for six years. And uh, get up when I wanted to, go to sleep when I wanted to, and go where I wanted to, and it's tough. But I'm still fortunate that they're old enough to take care of themselves. And I tell them, "I'm gonna see you later! I'll be back!" (laughing) That's one plus! But between 8:00 in the morning till about 7:00 at night, I'm still trapped. At least I feel trapped. You know, I have a responsibility to the kids.

Mr. Palacios reported that Mary used to go to her mother for emotional support, but within the last six months, "it's been half me, and half Rita. And when she's got personal problems, female problems, she goes to Rita, not her mom." When I asked why, Mr. Palacios responded, "There might be a little problem between her and her mom right now." Mary added, "I think she's upset about us moving." Mr. Palacios also commented that he believed Mary was closer to Rita than her mother because Rita was "more stable." The latest stressful event in the Palacios home concerned the issue of dating. This is what Mr. Palacios had to say:
I'm trying to be as strict as I can be. I don't believe in girls their age even going out with boys. But, uh, I still have to be, you know, this is the 90s and what I try to do is place myself in their shoes at that time, when I was their age... But later on, I just keep reminding them, they're only 15 years old! They're gonna make mistakes and I'm sure they're gonna correct them... I'm firm and I always plan to be firm. If I make a decision, that's what's going to happen. That's the way it's gonna go. They have no rights to speak of... Just like I told them that next year they're not going to that dance. Not at all. Don't even ask.

Mary responded that "he says that now," and basically she would "leave it for a while and when the time is right, ask again, and see what happens." Mr. Palacios replied, "Maybe I'll forget. It's a whole year, but right now I'm saying no, you're not going next year."

Academically, Mr. Palacios recalled, Mary and Monica were both A and B students in elementary school, "but heck, who isn't?" When they entered junior high school, many problems caused both girls to miss "a lot of school."

Some was physically, you know (Mary's cat scratch fever), but mostly, it wasn't. It was... their mother was just too laid back, I believe. I don’t believe she ever examined or forced them to do their homework. At one point, they were actually sometimes at the point where they were actually failing. This year, it's happened before, but we've been pushing her. But only because she's trying to strive further than her limits... Now, she's trying to do something that she might not be capable of doing. But I still give her credit for that...

Mr. Palacios attributed Mary's current decision to take Honors courses in the Spring to peer influence. "If these guys (Mary and Monica) want to hang around with those kids, I guess they have to do what they have to do" he stated, "I've always said you are who you hang around with." Indeed, as Mary previously mentioned to me, she had friends that were ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd in the freshmen class. Another friend was ranked 16th. This was a freshman class of
over 1000 students. Mr. Palacios said he had a strong suspicion Mary would get a C in her Advanced Algebra class, and "for her, it's good."

When I asked Mary's father to describe his relationship with his daughters, he said it was "great." He admitted to "pushing them at school, but more in life... You know, school means a lot, but I still think that common sense is a little more important than anything else." He said he is "a lot closer than when he was married and living with them" because he felt that was "the mother's job, to be responsible for that. But now, I feel that I'm a little closer to them. A lot closer, really."

I asked Mr. Palacios what issues he was most concerned about in raising Mary and Monica. His response did not surprise me.

I don't think it's strictly drugs. I don't think that they're that dumb. What worries me the most is that one day they come in and say, "Dad?" I don't know how I would handle that. If I could handle it... And well, in return, look at my son. I mean if he were to get somebody pregnant, then that's bad. I mean, you have one mouth to feed. You don't want another one. Or two. Sometimes you have to have them get married and that means they have to live with you. And... Call me weird or something, but I want my girls to go up north to college.... A lot of people say you're crazy, you can't send them up there. And only because, I never had that opportunity...

Mr. Palacios stated that there's a time in a person's life that is totally their own, where they have the freedom to experience a sense of being carefree, independent, and social in young adulthood. He wanted his children to experience this kind of stage in life during college and away from home because he never had that kind of an opportunity. I was surprised to discover that I was the only woman he had ever met that agreed with him on this subject.

**Teachers and School Life**
Journal Entry: 2-15-97
As I walked into the Honor's class today to see Mary, I noticed the door was open because the air conditioning was not working. It was so hot! This did not stop Mary from being her usual sunny and cheerful self. She seems to be as popular here with the boys and girls as she was in Mrs. Lennon's class—perhaps more. Toward the end of the period she brought me her wallet with pictures of herself and her friend Nathan at the Valentine's Day formal, and other pictures of her with her girlfriends. They all looked so nice—so dressed up and pretty... One of the things I noticed was the placement of the boy's hands on the girls' hips in the pictures. I did not think this would sit well with her father and I was right. Her father was unhappy with the pictures. I admitted I thought they were a bit inappropriate and Mary agreed, but the photographer posed them. I said, "Your father is protective, but I understand, two beautiful daughters and all"... She smiled and said, "Thank you Miss."

At the outset of the spring semester, Mary transferred to Mrs. Chavana's Honors English class, and she seemed to get along satisfactorily there. However, I noticed she was not as apt to share her thoughts aloud as the other students were, and she seemed a little more hesitant about participating in small group activities. After four months in the class, I interviewed her new teacher and asked her to describe Mary as a student from the time she first enrolled. This was Mrs. Chavana's response:

When she first came to me, she kind of had qualms about being moved up. She almost wanted to move back. And then she said, "It's a hard class"; "I don't think I can keep up with it"; and "I'm struggling." And I kind of reassured her. "Well, there's the tutorial. Come and ask me, but don't just sit there and die throughout the year." And then she said she'd get some help from her sister Monica and they'd study together. But she still seems to struggle a lot more than her sister in that class. So she's come in every once in a while. In the very beginning, I know she was almost, not that she's scared of me, but she was hesitant about approaching me. Almost as if she was maybe embarrassed to show that she had a problem with understanding. But when she came up to me, we were doing analogy, and that's a hard concept to get across to them. And she was struggling with it, and she came in the morning a couple of times and so that helped a little bit I think. I think she's still a little more comfortable now. She's still struggling, but I don't want her to go back to
Advanced. I really want her to keep an Honors class. I went ahead and made the recommendation.

Interestingly, Mrs. Chavana assumed Mary was generally one of the quiet students in the Advanced section, and the other kids in her class were just more comfortable making vocal contributions in class. I informed her that she was quite the contrary, but the level of analysis and critical thinking was much lower in that class, and this was probably the first time Mary was a bit humbled as a student.

On a scale of 1 to 10, one being most likely to fail and ten being most likely to succeed with a high average, Mrs. Chavana placed Mary at a 5 or a 6 at this point because "she is still struggling and she is not real sure about herself." Her writing was her weakest point because developmentally Mary needed "to get a lot of basic skills straightened out and [this is] what is hurting her right now because she really can't communicate as effectively as some of the other kids in the class." Mrs. Chavana believed with more practice, she would "move with the flow" and she encouraged her to keep the Honors class, "otherwise, you will never be forced to do more reading and everything that helps you develop the vocabulary and develop the flow and everything else."

Identifying Themes: Interpretation and Analysis

Six major themes emerged in Mary's profile including the following:

1. Seeks opportunities to learn and grow
2. Looks for something positive in situations that are beyond her control
3. Believes a close family is important
4. Copes with stressful situations in a variety of ways
5. Envisions a positive future for herself

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6. Has a positive self-concept.

Mary's decision to move from the Advanced English and Regular Algebra classes to Honors English and Advanced Algebra in the spring semester of her freshman year, indicate that she seeks opportunities to learn and grow as a person. Despite her awareness that she will most likely not earn an A, but "a low B or maybe even a C," Mary is convinced "it's going to help me at the end of the year" on the district test and the T.A.A.S. test. She and her father identified peer influence as giving her more confidence to make decisions that enable her to empower herself scholastically. Another way Mary seeks opportunities to learn and grow is by getting involved in extracurricular activities like drama, dance, and speech events. She likes the feeling of being the center of attention in dance, impressing the audience with her ability to get into character in drama and speech, and receiving trophies and other awards that symbolize her endeavor to succeed in these activities. Mrs. Chavana believes that Mary exhibits resilience in the way that she is "good about getting into things, trying out new ventures" and "she's not one of those kids that quits... If she has a problem, she comes up to me and asks me."

A second theme I identified was Mary's tendency to look for something positive in situations that were beyond her control. For instance, Mary's reflections about her "past in the hospital and stuff" made her realize she "was supposed to be here on this earth for a purpose." Having been born prematurely, contracted pneumonia as an infant, and suffered from a serious illness as a young girl gave Mary pause. Remembering the case of cat scratch fever most vividly, Mary recalled that her depression was broken by a sharp realization that other patients in the hospital were dying. "And me, I'm getting better. So I tried to convince
myself, 'I'm getting better! But they aren't. I shouldn't be feeling sorry for myself.'"

Her reactions to her parents' second marriages is another example. In informal conversations with Mary, she expressed her sincere happiness for both her parents and believed both would be happier with their new spouses. As her father indicated, Mary developed a close relationship with her new stepmother when she was his fiancé instead of an antagonistic one, the way many teenagers in her situation are likely to react. One of the things Mary really liked about her stepmother was the close ties Rita had with her family. For Mary, having the emotional and financial stability of a close family is important and it is one of the reasons she and her sister chose to live with their father. In fact, even before Mr. Palacios and Rita married, Mary and Monica were already referring to their younger stepsister as "our sister Roxanna" because they were anxious to get that sense of being a family as soon as possible. Mary's relationship with her father is close, and although they may disagree from time to time on an issue such as going to next year's Valentine's Day formal, Mary seems to understand her father's reasons for not allowing her to go (i.e., the expense involved, being too young to date, and possibly going through another painful experience involving a boy she liked).

A fourth theme was Mary's ability to cope with stressful situations in a variety of ways. For instance, Mary indicated that her transition to Honors English and Advanced Algebra was stressful. She employed a variety of study strategies in her efforts to keep from "drowning" in these classes such as making flashcards and reviewing them, studying a few weeks or a few days ahead of time, cramming, and mixing some of these strategies when she felt necessary. Mary admitted to coping with personal problems by "hid[ing] it with my perkiness,"
and if it gets to me too much, you know, I'll let it out and tell my friends." She goes to her sister for emotional support because Monica is "always around. She's always there." Her father noticed that Mary often seeks emotional support from Rita or himself. Mary admitted she sometimes cries on their shoulders when she feels she has disappointed them in terms of a low grade on a report card or failing on a test. Mrs. Chavana observed Mary is more comfortable now in coming to her when she has a problem. In her words, "Mary is very bubbly... very exuberant, you know... and the fact that she does get into so many different things (extracurricular) shows she's able to at least cope with her (new) schedule."

Another theme emerging from the data is Mary's ability to envision a positive future for herself. She sets short-term goals that will have positive long-term effects in the future. During the spring semester, despite her father's urging against it, Mary ran for a student council representative position. She lost the election by a small margin and was openly disappointed. Nevertheless, she wants to try again next year. Mr. Palacios is, admittedly, ambivalent about Mary (and Monica) being involved in so many school-related activities. On the one hand, he believes these activities are important and he is proud of his girls' accomplishments; however, he is concerned that they may be biting off more than they can chew, and their grades may suffer. Another factor here is the way many of these activities impinge on family time such as weekend outings, which Mr. Palacios believes is important. He explains to Mary, that "It's just too much work mija (my daughter), it's too much work!" His reaction to Mary's desire to be on the student council by her junior year is: "You can try out again, but I'm hoping you won't make it! (laughing)... I honestly think these kids just want more pictures in their yearbook." Mary disagrees with her father on this one, but
admits if she can be in one more extracurricular activity where she advances to state competition (such as student council), she can earn an "A" patch on her senior jacket. In addition, she set another goal this year: "If I get seven honor classes by the time I graduate, I can make an 'A' for honors. I can graduate with honors, so I'm trying hard to push for that."

Although she has dreams of attending an Ivy League university, Mary says she will settle for a local university in the Valley or a university in San Antonio. But whatever university she does attend, she envisions a bright future where she is "someone high in life" who has her name on the door of her office. Beyond a successful career, Mary also pictures a family life. She wants to be married, have children, own a house with a backyard, but only after she has proven she can accomplish a few things independently— "a house of my own, under my name, a car under my name, and that I must have before I get married... if I get married and anything happens, I have that to fall back on... if I have children, I have to be financially stable." In short, Mary has no illusions of adulthood as being easy or marriage as an institution that is flawless. She is both an idealist and a realist; that is, she has ideals she feels capable of striving for and an understanding that these ideals may not be perfectly or easily obtained.

A final theme is Mary's positive self-concept, which can be linked in part to her social status at school. In this milieu, Mary is considered a prep— someone who is taking more advanced coursework, whose friends are considered "popular," and who is involved in extracurricular events that most of the "smart kids" or "nerds" (as they are often called) seem to participate in at Amistad City High. Because she has experienced academic and extracurricular success, and continues to strive to do her best, her self-concept is growing more positive every
Her outgoing personality also contributes to promoting a high sense of self. Mary’s statement that she doesn’t like “being somewhere and not knowing no one,” so she “makes friends with everyone,” and her acknowledgment that she wants to be heard among her peers (e.g., she “wants to top their voice[s]... not drown [them], but make [her] point clear”), reveals her confidence in herself—that she is someone worth meeting, knowing, and listening to. Finally, Mary’s sense of what is good for her (good friends, challenging classes, a close family) and what is not (drugs, sex, a negative outlook) is yet another indication that Mary views herself in a positive light.
CHAPTER 6
DATA PRESENTATION AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS:
THE SECOND CASE STUDY

Lupita Garza: Desperately Seeking "The Perfect Life"

Journal Entry: 10/31/95

I ran into Lupita and her sister, Carmela, at the laundry mat where they were busy doing the family's laundry. Lupita told me she actually does the laundry there every week and that her family consisted of her mother, her sister (and her newborn baby), the maid, and herself. Her mother didn't have time to wash clothes because she had to work at the farmer's market where she has a fruit and vegetable stand... Lupita is a really sweet girl who is absolutely beautiful inside and out. She has dark brown, medium length, curly hair with natural auburn highlights, large hazel eyes, ivory skin with pink undertones, freckles, full lips, and expressive brows. She has a petite frame, stands at about 5'4" or so and weighs about 110 lbs. Just a beautiful, well-mannered girl....

I remember this chance meeting with Lupita at a local laundry mat was so timely because I spoke with Mrs. Chavana about her just a few days prior. Her responses to my questionnaire, my observations of her in class, and Mrs. Chavana's description of her as "one of the strongest students in the Honors section" indicated she would be a good choice for a case study participant. She had several at-risk factors such as her minority status and low educational attainment of one or both her parents. In addition, Lupita's socioeconomic status was low to lower middle-class; she came home to an empty household everyday after school; and her parents were getting divorced. Despite these factors, Lupita...
was one of the top five students in the class. I asked her if she would be interested in participating in the study and she enthusiastically said she would.

Lupita's school records revealed she took all Advanced classes in junior high, making straight As in every subject, except for math during her sixth grade year when she scored a B+. She passed her norm-referenced T.A.A. S. exams (assessment for reading, writing, and mathematics skills) every year as well. In ninth grade, she was placed in one Honors class (English), two Advanced courses (Spanish and biology), Regular Algebra I, and courses which are not grouped by ability, such as health, theater arts, and public speaking. In the spring semester, she chose to move up to Advanced Algebra I after scoring a 100 average during the fall semester in the Regular section. She struggled in the more challenging math class, earning a 60 average for the spring semester, and a B average for the year.

Lupita was not one of the most vocal students in Mrs. Chavana's Honors English class, at least not when it came to speaking out during whole class discussions. However, she was typically quite expressive during small group work, or cooperative learning class activities:

Fieldnotes: 1/16/97
In the Honors class, Lupita is her usual conscientious and serious self. She is also a leader among the small group of friends that usually work together. She never wastes any time getting started.... I noticed toward the end of class, she was rewriting her answers to the essay questions. Mrs. Chavana noticed as well: "Lupita, you don't need to rewrite this. It's perfectly legible. Don't worry about it." Lupita reluctantly obliged.

The essay questions on the board are related to literary elements like tone, allusion, and symbolism. Mrs. C wants her students to learn to pick out examples of these elements from the text and apply them in their essay writing.
During fieldwork, I noted the Honors class seemed to be very calm, respectful, task-oriented, and ready for anything Mrs. Chavana planned for them. She usually had at least two activities planned, but most often, three, during a 55 minute class period. There was rarely a minute to spare, but when there was, she filled it by giving them oral quizzes on literary terms, literary figures, and classic works of literature, or she gave them SSR time (silent sustained reading). Lupita was always quick to shift from activity to activity easily and getting right to the task at hand. She was extremely conscientious, taking each assignment quite seriously. Her circle of friends in the class, who usually grouped themselves together for cooperative learning activities, often chose her to be the recorder and the speaker for the group. Lupita never let her group down; in fact, she customarily shared her group's responses insightfully and articulately to the rest of the class with great poise.

As I came to know Lupita, I learned her parents were currently separated and likely to divorce. The situation at home was stressful for Lupita, and a source of great anxiety. Although she was living with her mother, sister, and a live-in maid at the time she agreed to be in the study, the situation changed a few weeks later, when her father moved back to the house, her sister went back to Central City (with her baby and husband), and the maid was dismissed. With Lupita's father at home more, Mrs. Garza was free to spend more time at the family business, and Lupita saw this as the root of all her problems. She complained her mother was always working and she missed her very much. She also felt betrayed by her mother because her father, with whom she did "not get along," was back home, while her mother, whom she "trusted" was never around when she needed her.

I conducted all interviews with Lupita at the Garza residence described in the following:
Journal Entry: 1-25-96

The house where Lupita lives is a small wood frame house (white I think, it was dark when I arrived). The yard has not been maintained for a while—tall grass and weeds grow up to knee-length everywhere and an old, broken-down, clothes washer sits on the front porch. There is an abandoned, 70s model, Chevy truck in front of the house. The street, like many rural streets outside the city limits of Amistad City, is unpaved at the time. One can just barely hear music and men's voices coming from Johnny's Pool Palace on the corner of the street.

Once inside, the home is neat and clean, smelling of pine and eucalyptus plants. Lupita, barefooted and alone tonight, says she had just finished mopping the floors a few minutes before I arrived.

In the profile that follows, Lupita describes many aspects of her life including her feelings about her parents, her problems, her coping strategies, and her academic and personal goals in life. This interview data was obtained during three interviews conducted during the spring semester of 1995 at her home and is presented in the order in which it came. It begins with Lupita's description of herself:

I'm the kind of person that—like if they put us in a group to work together, I want to do everything because I want everything to get done right. I don't care how much time I need to spend. I don't care how much money I need to spend, but I'm the type of person that's like a perfectionist. I need to have everything right and that kind of thing gets me into trouble sometimes, you know, because I don't want to give other people a chance... I try to dominate too much and then when I'm in a group and I want to let other people do [group projects], they're like, 'Well, you do it, you're smart, you can talk.'...

I believe that I get along with people really fine, especially with the work that I have with my mom. I work at a farmer's market. My mom's been in that business for fifteen years, so I get to deal with a lot of people. I go every Saturday to work, and we get over four hundred people so I have to deal with all sorts of people, all sorts of personalities. In a way, I get to know what different types of people there are in the world, you know? So I see myself as a very open person, you know, I can talk to anybody. I can get into a conversation really easy....
But sometimes, I can be real shy too. It's like, I don't know if you noticed or whatever, when they ask me a question, people that I don't know, I get really red. I get really shy. I have my shy side, but it's very rare. It depends on the mood I'm in... I get into my little moods and I admit it.... I usually take it out on my parents. I apologize to them, but I do take it out on other people and sometimes I feel bad, but it's too late, you know? Even if you go say sorry, you can't make up for what you just did. And I hate myself sometimes for that because I wouldn't like it to be done to me. So why do I have to be doing that to other people? And I feel bad, but that's one of my most negative traits...

I always set strong goals for myself, like usually, I don't know if you've noticed that [mothers] always say, like they always give you negative feedback... They tell you, "You have to learn how to do this because once you get married, the husband is going to leave you," and I've noticed myself, that I always have a positive outlook in life. I'm like, "Mom, I don't have to worry about that." You know, I'm like, I'm not the house type of person, you know, and so it's like I always have a positive outlook in life. I always want the best for myself. I don't know if I'm ever going to get it, but I always have a positive outlook. It's not that I plan it; it's just that I'm a real positive person....

When you're in school, you kind of, like, you're afraid a little bit. To show your identity. Because, you know, I don't want them to think that I'm... you know!... With my friends, I can be whoever I am, at home and everything. But, at school, it's like, I'm kind of like, shy. When it gets into the thing like getting into groups, I get carried away. I do start talking, but yet I'm not the same person that I am here at home. You know, I'm kind of shy at school. It's like, I don't like asking questions [in front of] the class. I always wait until after class to ask questions. I'm really shy and the weird thing is that even though I have this kind of job where I get to deal with all sorts of people, and I'm definitely not shy, everybody knows me there... I'm a completely different person. At school, I'm more like shy and at work and at home, I'm like, myself...

I do not feel comfortable... In most of my classes, all I have are like preppies and so they usually— they're big criticizers. So I have to take care of my identity, you know? Cause it's happened to me before. I've showed them my true self and then the next day, a completely new word is out...

Usually when I have problems, I'm more the kind of person that likes to keep things to myself. When I have personal problems, I don't really like saying them because of my past experiences. But if I really really really need to,
I mean, I completely need to let it out, I talk to my friends, and it's very rare when one of my teachers finds out about my personal problems. The only way I will tell them is if they completely need to—like if they say I'm going down in my class and they need to know my excuse...

I usually keep them (problems) to myself because what good will they do? You tell them, "Oh everything's going to be all right." They can't help you. Nobody can help you... You have to deal with it. And I've learned to do this, so with my friends, I don't really tell them my personal problems. Maybe every now and then, but what's the use, you know?...

I've always believed that if you let yourself go too much with your friends or anything, at the end, they just end up throwing it in your face. They can use it as a backstab. So it's like, don't let go of all your [secrets] too much because you give a person all of your secrets, you're letting go of your liberty too, all of it, completely...

I was going through some problems in school and I kind of like, sort of, told my mom because I was getting into my mood changes and she was all like "What's wrong mija?" (my daughter) and like, you know, cause she even would go to my sister crying in tears. "Why is Lupita acting this way? She yells at me and all that." I kind of told her why but I didn't tell her completely. You know, she kind of has the idea of what's going on, but for a long period of time, I kept it to myself. But then, New Year's came and I made a resolution. I started changing completely and my mom noticed the change and now everything's alright. But I kind of like had to tell her why because I was really getting into some trouble... enough for her to understand what I was going through and why I was doing it, but I kept it all to myself. Nobody knew about it...

Probably the only [major] thing that's ever happened to me was when my parents were going through a divorce. I always thought that it wouldn't affect me, you know? ... Because me and my dad, I mean, it would be the same if I was with him or without him. I mean, I hardly ever see him and I don't get along with him in the first place... It was pretty tough for me because my mom would take it out on me. I was the only one left. My sister lives way over in Central City. She (mom) would take it on her too but since I'm the one closer... And then, it would be hard on me because I hardly ever see my mother. And when we do see each other, it would be just to fight... This still goes on right now. When they were going through the divorce and I was going through all of that, it was way harder because my dad would tell me things about my mom and she would want to find out about things he said... And each one would want to say, "Oh what did the other one tell you?" and my mom one time told me to pay attention to
the conversations my dad had over the phone. And I told her I wasn't
going to do that. I mean, "Your business is your business." And she got
mad at me. She said that when I'm with her, when she has to make the
decision, but when it comes to beating him and stuff like that, then I'm not
with her. You know, little stuff like that, you know? It hurts to be taking
sides...

[She hasn't quite divorced him]. She goes on and off. My mom still has
the letter and she has the deed (restraining order) that my dad can't be in
the house... She takes him back. I don't understand why. Ya, it's been
three times *que* she threatens him, you know? But she still accepts him...

And so my dad feels like they're only threats— that nothing's ever going to
happen. Really, my mom, she like completely blew it off... I'm not sure.
She tells me a couple of days ago that she told him that they were because
we had a huge fight and it was because of me... Basically the point is that I
got mad at them because they're always fighting over who's going to take
me where or who's going to pick me up, so I felt like a— like a bother to
them in their lives... I felt like if they didn't have me, they wouldn't have
to be worrying over who's going to take who— or you know?...

I gave them a little scare and they thought something had happened to me
and everything, and so then, we had a long talk and my mom decided to
divorce again... But it's, it just keeps going on and on...

It's hard on me... It's like, my mom tells me to tell my dad everything that I
felt. I told him everything that I felt, but because she said that she was
going to have him out of the house— like that I wouldn't have to face him
anymore. But then, instead, she still keeps him here. And after
everything that I told him, it makes me like, how do I look at him in the
eyes anymore?... Because I told him some pretty heavy stuff... What I
don't even like is that they don't even ask me and it makes me feel bad,
you know? Like I'm not even a part of the family...

I'm growing up. I have a life, you know! I have problems on my own in
the outside world. Then I come home and still deal with this... I mean, I
told him exactly how I felt. When you have anger, aren't you going to say
everything you think?... For two or three days, they were like," *¿Qué
tienes?*" ("What's wrong?"). They just blew it off... And then, because of
me, my mom won't leave my dad. I know that, but it's hard... For me, I
really don't know. I would think, for me, I'd rather they not be together
because then I wouldn't have so much troubles...
But then again, I mean, it's very hard for me to earn respect from the
outside world when there's not two parents in the house. You know, it's
hard! And then, your friends, you know, they talk, "My father, my
mother"... so it's pretty hard to get into those conversations when you don't even have a father at home...

Really, I've never noticed whether I need a quiet place to study or not, but I prefer it. I mean if I completely need to work in the cafeteria, I'll do it, but really, I can't think because I get too distracted too fast. My mind just like goes off... You have to deal with all sorts of environments cause you're not always going to get your way... I just do what has to be done and I usually leave the studying till later... if I have a lot of things to study... 30 minutes for this, or an hour for this if I really need it. I give myself tests and all that. I give myself pop quizzes... usually for vocabulary tests. I wait till the last minute because they stay in my head faster. I can study for two hours the night before, but usually I study in the morning and I pass cause they usually stay in my head...

Being in Honors, it's not that I can't deal with it, it's just that you need a lot of discipline. You need to be really responsible. You know, it's like right now, we have a lot of things to do for English this week, and I have to be all the time organized to do that. You know, it's just that you need to be organized; that's all... And you need to give yourself time. I'm not complaining about the work she gives us, cause I mean, it is Honors. I'm not expecting Advanced or Regular work. It's just that I need time, you know?...

[In 8th grade], the teacher picked me to go to Amistad City University so I went to the university to take some engineering courses... (actually, the Tex-Prep youth program for students with strong math and science skills) [and I'm going again this summer]. It helps me out because next year, I'm going to take a geometry class and an algebra class. So because I'm already having trouble with algebra now, I want to at least get a feeling for what geometry is...

[I wanted to learn to] debate with the Hispanic Institute [this summer]... Well, I sent everything and they sent me a letter back— that I was accepted... And she (mother) doesn't want me to. She doesn't want me to leave and I really wanted to be in that...

Okay, I hold a big grudge against my dad. I don't get along with him. I know I treat him like any person and I know that that's wrong on my part... I can't help it... It's that I have so many bad memories of him. I don't feel that he has earned the respect. If my mom would have left us at the care at my father, we wouldn't be here. Because he thinks that everything is settled by hitting. All that. When he married with my mom, he would like beat her. I mean I was there! Me and my sister would be right there. "Daddy Stop! Stop!" It's like he got a joy out of that. He
would go on harder. I was there. I mean it's just as if it were yesterday. I mean and that's hard to get over...

He never hit me. He's tried very hard, but it's that one time he tried to hit me like really bad. And my sister got in it and he hit her. But my sister no se deja (doesn't allow him to beat her). She threw him to the floor and started punching him. Cause no lo vamos a dejar (we not going to let him do this) cause he doesn't have the right. He tries to be all macho, macho, and he doesn't do anything for the family...

Nobody's ever really believed in me. Nobody's ever believed that I can do something... Nobody's ever had trust in me. My aunts think the worst of me as well as my grandma. They only love my sister. I mean, nobody's ever believed I can do it. I mean, and then, when I thought that my mom did, and then all of a sudden, ... she turns on me! It's the only person that I have... My mom, in a way, [offers her emotional support], but like I really don't spend time with her. So she's supportive, but like only when it's for her own good. You know? She doesn't let me try things out. She just tells me, "No." ...

Right now, I'm more into searching groups of peers where you have to choose your groups of friends. And you have to think about your future... And whoever you're with, that's how people judge you. So right now, I make pretty conscious choices... I don't want to get near a person that I know is going to cause me problems. I just take my own way. I talk my way out of it or something. I can usually talk my way out of it. You know, just like, go the other way. Just turn around... That's what I do best...

I want the perfect future... and a perfect family... I have my own mental picture... (laughingly admits) It's cause I'm a real perfectionist. I want everything to go right... I definitely want to go to a university... I have my eyes set on University of Texas at Austin... My mom is like, "Why do you want to go to Austin when Amistad City University is a good school?" And I'm interested in UT... It's between marine biology and biology... I love science... [University of Texas] already sent me everything about biology. They send me everything, anything I need...

Mom says I'm looking for la libertad (freedom). It's not that. She knows that most of the privileges that I ask her, it's to go and do homework... Once or twice a week it's to be with my friends, but the rest of the time, it's to go use the computers (at school), to got to the library, and she uses them as excuses to go out. But I just go do my work... I don't want to go away to go out to do anything. No. I want to go away so I can
concentrate 100% on my studies, but I don't really want to go away. I want to go to Amistad City University [actually]. To me, anywhere. I'll adapt... I don't care. I just want to get a good education...

[My parents], when I see them, I'm like all stressed out about school and I'm always in the books. That's all I do, so... my mom tells me, "no me pones atención" (you don't pay attention to me). But it's because I have other things to do... And then I feel bad because when she has the time for me, I don't have time for her because I'm like, right now, especially because I have exams. I don't have time for nothing. I've been going to sleep at two in the morning doing my homework, studying and studying... I don't know how to make her understand. It's not that I'm obsessed with it, it's just that I'm responsible... And what I hate the most is that there's no way that I can organize my time. It's all crumbled up and I want to do so many things at once...

My challenges are day by day, putting all my strength to it, and never giving up. But that's the main thing that I can provide. I can't say it exactly, but just trying... My greatest accomplishment? Surviving this! All this! Cause it's not only in the family; it's the outside world.

Among other significant things I was unable to fit into this profile, Lupita mentioned she disliked the her neighborhood. Although she has lived there all her life, she and her parents never talk to their neighbors, and people are generally unfriendly and distrustful there. In addition, gangs formed in the area bringing violent activity from time to time, "but you know, it's just practically to show off and stuff," claimed Lupita.

She was not thrilled about her school environment either: "Really, I'm okay with it, but I think there's too much violence... I think there's too much violence for one person and everybody takes it. We get denied a lot of opportunities because of them." In addition, Lupita informed me of her recent decision to "make a devotion" never to do drugs, because they were not something that would enhance her life. Her attitude toward having premarital sex was also negative: "Definitely not, unless you're going to take full
responsibility of your actions. If you think you are responsible enough to go and
do it, you should be responsible enough to take care of your own actions."

Lupita viewed sex "as a treasure, it's special and it has to be with the right
person... to me, it would be the biggest accomplishment if I can remain a virgin
until my marriage." Finally, Lupita concluded the following in response to my
question about her spiritual beliefs:

Anything that happens to me, it's somewhat a force of God... I never
condemn Him for anything that's happening to me. How we say it, it's
because God wanted it like this. He knows why he did it. I never
condemn him for nothing... There's a reason for everything.

Parents and Home Life

When Angelina Garza discovered she was pregnant with Lupita, she had
only three months to go in the pregnancy. Because she did not experience many
of the common symptoms associated with pregnancy, she thought she was just
having an irregular menstrual cycle due to tension. She felt normal up to her
sixth month and gained very little weight until then. Mrs. Garza described
Lupita as a "very good baby" who always liked attention. As a young child,
Lupita would like "playing on the swings and she'd pretend to be a trapeze
artist." And because she practically grew up at the farmer's market, she
developed a keen business sense early in life:

She has an intelligence like this (opens arms widely).... As a very small
child she was always with me, right, selling fruit on the street... She was
raised among adults, and so I think this is why she is so mature. This is
how it develops, right. I have an experience with her when she was, I
think, five years old. And we were at the farmer's market, shopping like
any other person... And she asked me for fifty cents... and she went to buy
some cherries... She wanted to make some money, and with the 50 cents I
gave her, she made $1.00. I told her, "Look mija, tell the man where you
bought the cherries." "No mama, no!" She wanted to make her 50 cents.
But I tell you, she was so little. I was surprised with her brightness... She
had not even started school....
Mrs. Garza described Lupita’s home life as a child as "normal as any home with its highs and lows and everything, just what is a life journey." She admits that her marriage with her husband has been difficult at times, and there have been times where they have had arguments, but "it was something that is livable, something that is natural in every home." Her husband, Jaime Garza, has severe arthritis, so disabling, he is unable to work. He receives monthly disability checks and helps Mrs. Garza at the register from time to time. Mrs. Garza claims that her daughters complain about him because "he never does anything" and "he has a bad character," yet she defends him:

I tell them, look mijitas, your father is good. Your father has never given you a bad example. Your father is sick, he can't give you what you would like him to give you, right. And he's not a drunk... He doesn't like that. He doesn't have any vices, nothing like that. We're just working people and we work and that's all...

While Lupita was eight years old, the family went through some hard times as Mrs. Garza sacrificed everything they had to get the small produce business started and buy their house. Lupita seemed to manage well during this time according to her mother, seeking her for emotional support when she needed it. Mrs. Garza said that she and Lupita "have always been like this (crosses her fingers)... I have always tried to be there for her in good times and in bad times." She admits that she spends very little time with her now, but she's made some changes in her heavy work schedule to make time for Lupita, such as picking her up everyday after school and taking her to dinner, so they can have quality time to catch up on things:

That's what we're trying to change right now because I have neglected her somewhat because I've been so busy with the business... I have been telling her recently that the business is good. I am trying to expand it and
everything. But what we need is more family unity. More family support. I tell her, me and your father, alone we cannot do anything. We need to have your support too...

Although Mrs. Garza understands Lupita's relationship with her father is "not good," she believes Lupita will understand her parents' relationship when she grows up.

I depend on her father. For example, I tell her, "you and I cannot be here eating supper if your father was not at the business.".... Sometimes we come to Teresita's All Nite Cafe and have coffee or dinner and sit here till 1 or 2 in the morning talking and talking about her friends, her admirers, and I listen to her.... She still doesn't understand what Jaime is doing for us... If he was someone else, he would leave. He's disabled. He doesn't need to be there. He gets his checks... I see all those points, that's why I'm flexible with Jaime. I don't agree with certain things about him, but he's my husband. His way of being affects her a lot. Lupita wants a father that laughs with her, plays with her, and this and that. And Jaime is serious. With me too. That's the way he is. I have tried to talk to him various times but that's the way he is....

Mrs. Garza, who attended secondary school in Mexico, boasts that her daughter has always had a thirst for learning. "Extreme. I say extreme," she states. Lupita did not attend preschool or kindergarten. According to her mother, Lupita went straight into first grade at six years of age, and she was not unprepared:

She was with me in the trucks selling fruit and I bought her math books and I taught her her ABC's, and like that, when she entered first grade, she already knew a little bit. I taught her songs. She learned to sing rancheras. She observed everything that I gave her and she would talk about it. One time, I taught her a poem, and like that (snaps fingers), she learned it...

Lupita's first language is Spanish and she speaks fluently in both Spanish and English today. Her school records show she was placed in the ESL (English as a
Second Language) program in first and second grade before being mainstreamed in regular English classes. An A and B student throughout elementary and a straight A student in junior high, Lupita was currently making As in all content areas, except Honors English and Advanced Algebra I, where she had high B averages. Mrs. Garza believed Lupita's motivation to achieve in school is due to her fascination with her school assignments. She sometimes thought Lupita made up assignments because she was simply more interested in books than she was in helping out at the business or doing household chores. However, Mrs. Garza seemed reasonably satisfied with her daughter's explanation: "Lupita says they assign much more work because she's in advanced classes."

Several times during our conversations, Mrs. Garza spoke of her daughter with pride and admiration. She claimed to want nothing more than for Lupita to be happy, and she expected her daughter would be successful in her future chosen career. In addition, Mrs. Garza firmly believed that she had played a part in her daughter's aspirations for a successful career and a better quality of life:

"My daughter is very intelligent, very beautiful and very... I don't know, I think she has all the characteristics to be successful. I have told her, "you are going to have everything you ever wanted, if you want it." I have raised them in this style. I have always said there are no limitations. Let them be accustomed to the good things. Even though we must sacrifice. But they should accustom themselves to the good things. That way they will not accept a lower quality life. This is my way of thinking..."

Mrs. Garza also attributed Lupita's choice of friends as influencing her to strive higher academically saying, "She has a flair for getting involved with good friends."

I asked Mrs. Garza about her observations of her daughter's ways of dealing with stressful events or situations, particularly during the time when Lupita was eight years old and the family was undergoing financial constraints,
and then again recently with the delicate situation between herself and her husband. She stated she always let her children know when they were having problems because it helped them mature. At eight years of age, Lupita knew they were going through tough financial times because her mother explained the situation to her, pointing out that it was a sacrifice the family had to make in order to get the business off the ground and to buy a house of their own. Lupita and her mother talked things out openly. Lately, however, Mrs. Garza noticed that Lupita copes with stressful situations and events more quietly:

She speaks two or three words and that's it. She'll be quiet. Time passes and she finally tells me. "I didn't like this or that. You shouldn't have told me this or that". ... I think there is sufficient communication between me and Lupita, but there are times where I am in a bad mood. When she knows I am in a better mood, she'll tell me what's on her mind. "Look mom, I don't like this or that"... I don't really give her so many responsibilities at home because I see her giving 100% at school. They give her so much work...

The issues that concerned Mrs. Garza the most about her daughter is that she isn't doing enough to satisfy Lupita's desires to spend more time with her, to be a tougher business woman, and to find another place to live. In short, Mrs. Garza's concern is for her daughter to be happy, but she feels Lupita expects more than Mrs. Garza can give her:

She thinks very big and I know that she will be prepared for that world right. She has the capabilities. But at times, I feel a little, how can I say it? Not limited, but... I worry that she thinks of things so large, large, large! I feel incapable because I cannot fulfill the things she wants me to accomplish... I mean, Lupita told me she wants a nana because she feels alone sometimes—a nana that will listen to her because she wants to tell her stories. She wants a big, grand house and a nana (chuckles)....
Teachers and School Life

Fieldnotes: 2/15/1996
Lupita is wearing blue jeans, black combat boots, and a sleeveless black top. She is spaced out today. Does not appear to be paying attention (or) perhaps this is too basic for her or boring? No. I think she may feel sick. Lots of commentary today, but Lupita's not into it.

The students are working on figuring out unknown vocabulary using context clues. Questions posed by Mrs. C. are: What does it sound like? What do you think it means based on this sentence? Is "rigid" more in connotation than "arrested" here?

Lupita has told me that she is quiet and she doesn't like to take risks or participate in whole class discussions... She also told me she gets moody when she's confused. It appears she's getting out of her mood though. She's taken initiative and borrowed a thesaurus from the cabinet. Glad to see that.

Lupita's mood swings were rare and short-lived. She tended to change from her normally upbeat and cheerful disposition to a frustrated one in class when she was unclear or confused about the class assignments, or when she did not have sufficient time to complete an assignment in a manner that satisfied her. I asked Mrs. Chavana to describe Lupita as a student in her class and the following was her response:

Lupita has always been the type of student that is always on task and focused. She sits at the front of the room and when she is confused about something, she always lets me know, even through her facial gestures. She crinkles her forehead and nose when she's stumped, and that's my cue to explain myself in a way that's more comprehensible to the class... I would describe Lupita's usual disposition as perky. She is usually always smiling and happy in class. Her demeanor is calm, collected, and mature. She is never shy, always personable, and never that panicky about learning challenging material. She's really very mature. I've noticed also that Lupita tends to go between English and Spanish quite a bit: "Pero es que no entiendo Miss" ("But I don't understand Miss"), but she always lets me know when she is having trouble with something....
Mrs. Chavana was aware of Lupita's demanding work schedule outside of school— that she was expected to keep up with most of the household chores at home, work with her mother everyday for a few hours on weeknights and all day Saturday at the farmer's market, and do the family's laundry on Sundays. For this reason, Mrs. Chavana said she would place Lupita between an 8 and a 9 on a 10 point scale— 1 being most likely to fail her class and 10 being most likely to succeed in her class with a very high average. "In that realm, given the stresses of her workload at home, with homelife sometimes being a distracter, I would have to say an 8," said Mrs. Chavana, "although I think she is certainly capable of accomplishing anything she sets her mind on, and going as far as she would like to go."

**Identifying Themes: Interpretation and Analysis**

The following five themes emerged from Lupita's profile including the following:

1. Has a positive self-concept
2. Seeks opportunities to learn and grow
3. Copes with stressful situations in a variety of ways
4. Envisions a positive future for herself
5. Believes a close family is important

Lupita's description of herself in positive terms such as being a "perfectionist" when it comes to schoolwork, "someone who gets along with people," "a very open person," and someone who "always has a positive outlook" reveals her positive self-concept. She says, "I always want the best for myself," and strives to do everything she can to achieve that. Mrs. Garza suggested that she has
fostered her daughter's positive self-concept in the way that she has raised her. "I have always said there are no limitations. Let them be accustomed to the good things. That way they will not accept a lower quality of life. This is my way of thinking."

Significantly, Lupita's positive self-concept is also connected to her social status at school. As an Honors English student, Lupita is aware of the high expectations Mrs. Chavana has for all of her students, and she does not want to let her teacher, or herself, down. Her observation that "you need to be really responsible" and "have to be all the time organized" when you take Honors courses, was constantly challenged by distracters that seemed to get in the way, such as her part-time job at the farmer's market, her social time with peers, chores at home, and parents who are having marital problems. Being able to juggle time-consuming homework and dealing with difficult situations in "the outside world," as Lupita puts it, is part of being an Honors student. Lupita also observed that Honors status requires more time, discipline, and commitment: "I'm not complaining about the work she gives us, cause I mean, it is Honors. I'm not expecting Advanced or Regular work. It's just that I need time, you know?"

In sum, Lupita seemed to view herself positively because she is able to achieve success in an Honors class "by putting all my strength to it, and never giving up... that's the main thing I can provide. I can't say it exactly, but just trying."

A second theme in the profile data is Lupita's inclination to seek opportunities to learn and grow. She described herself as someone who "always set[s] strong goals" for herself and "make[s] pretty conscious choices" when it comes to choosing peers to befriend and associate with because "you have to think about your future... and whoever you're with, that's how people judge you." Lupita's close friends were people who also took the Honors English
course and Advanced Algebra with her and who could identify with her struggles to cope with parental and educational expectations—expectations that required time and energy and that often conflicted with one another. In this sense, I interpreted her conscious efforts to associate with certain peers as her attempt to learn and grow from these relationships.

Another way Lupita sought opportunities to learn and grow was in her decision to attend a summer youth program since "it helps me out because next year I'm going to take a geometry class and an algebra class." Her desire to attend a debate camp for Hispanic students was also self-initiated: "I wanted to learn to debate with the Hispanic Institute this summer." In an informal conversation I had with Lupita, she told me she was really disappointed in her mother's decision not to let her attend because it would be a good way for her to overcome the shyness she experiences when faced with assignments that require speaking in front of her class, and it would "just be a good learning experience to prepare me for college."

Lupita demonstrated her ability to cope with stressful situations in a variety of ways. For instance, because lack of time is a significant problem for Lupita, she has learned to study whenever and wherever she can because "you have to deal with all sorts of environments cause you're not always going to get your way." She has also learned to manage her study time more effectively by waking up early in the morning to study before vocabulary tests instead of studying for two hours the night before because "they usually stay in my head."

Lupita's parents' marriage, confusing her with talk of divorce one day and reconciliation the next, was the most stressful situation for her during the time of this study. It became apparent that Lupita coped with it in several ways such as confiding in her mother about her feelings. Whenever she felt her mother did not
understand her point of view, or disregarded how strong Lupita's feelings were against her father, Lupita coped by *keeping her feelings to herself*. Her "little moods," as she put it, were usually a few days of the silent treatment toward her mother followed by breaking the silence when her mother was in good spirits and Lupita had had sufficient time to cool off. During her cool off time, Lupita buried herself in her school work, which seemed to provide a healthy temporary escape from problems at home and functioned as a locus of control. Ironically, it was her mother who now complained that Lupita was not paying enough attention to her:

> But it's because I have other things to do... I don't know how to make her understand. It's not that I'm obsessed with it, it's just that I'm responsible... And what I hate the most is that there's no way that I can organize my time. It's all crumbled up and I want to do so many things at once...."

Lastly, Lupita noted she rarely talked to her friends as a means of coping with stressful situations "because of past experiences" (i.e., people that didn't keep things confidential) and that have ultimately made her more cautious in terms of who she speaks to and what she says.

The fourth theme I identified is Lupita's ability to *envision a positive future* for herself. In fact, she claims to want "the perfect future" which means obtaining a university education. At fifteen, Lupita has given a great deal of thought about life beyond high school and she and her mother have engaged in discussions regarding her choice of universities. Going away to college is something Lupita wants to do so she can "concentrate 100% on [her] studies," but given her mother's feelings on the subject she is flexible enough to say "I'll adapt... I don't care. I just want to get a good education." As Mrs. Chavana stated, "I think she is certainly capable of accomplishing anything she sets her mind to, and going as
far as she would like to go." Yet, Lupita's awareness that her mother needs her help in the family business may be what will keep her close to home. Time will soon tell.

I found a fifth theme in the data; that is, a close family is important to Lupita. Throughout the time I spent with her, it was apparent she loved her mother deeply and wanted them to be as close as any mother and daughter could be. She identified her mother as the only person in her family whom she ever confided in for emotional support, but that it was often provided only on her mother's terms, or "when it's for her own good." Lupita explained that her mother sometimes did not have time to listen to her daughter's problems or to just have mother-daughter talks. This was Lupita's main resentment toward her mother, and the reason why Lupita now preferred to handle stressful situations by keeping things to herself.

Mr. Garza is a huge disappointment for Lupita. Although Mrs. Garza explains that "Lupita wants a father that laughs with her, plays with her, and this and that," Lupita can identify many more reasons to resent her father other than his lack of warmth and attention for his daughter. These include memories of her father abusing her mother and half-sister, and attempts to hit her—memories that have had a lasting effect on their relationship today. Additionally, Lupita has suggested that her father uses his disability as an excuse for being an irresponsible father to her and husband to her mother: "He tries to be all macho, macho, and he doesn't do anything for the family." Still Lupita admits her parents talk of divorce has affected her, despite her negative feelings toward her father. Her ambivalence shows in her observations that "it hurts to be taking sides" and "it's very hard to earn respect from the outside world when there's not two parents in the house... and then, your friends, you know, they talk, 'My
father, my mother'... so it's pretty hard to get into those conversations when you
don't even have a father at home."

Lupita envisions a perfect future, and this includes a perfect family. "I
have my own mental picture... (laughingly admits). It's cause I'm a real
perfectionist. I want everything to go right." Although she has difficulty
accepting her parents as they are, she is making an effort to learn to accept them
with their mortal flaws in significant ways. As Lupita revealed at one point in
the profile, when her problems at home (i.e., the separation of her parents, steps
taken toward divorce, and surprise reconciliation) occurred, it started to affect
her schoolwork. "But then, New Year's came and I made a resolution. I started
changing completely and my mom noticed the change and now everything's all
right." In essence, Lupita decided to accept that her parents were the ones who
had a problem, that she was not going to get involved in their disputes, and that
her grades were not going to suffer. She started to think of herself independently
and autonomously, as she emotionally exclaimed: "I'm growing up. I have a life,
you know! I have problems of my own in the outside world."
CHAPTER 7

DATA PRESENTATION AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS:
THE THIRD CASE STUDY

Rachel Longoria: Thinking Her Way to the Top

Journal Entry: 11/30/97

Rachel— Geez, she's a hard nut to crack! She hadn't even talked to her mother about the study. I asked her to do so over the Thanksgiving holiday, but she said she had forgotten. With Rachel, gaining trust and rapport is going to be hard. She simply does not seem to trust people too readily, I think. She strikes me as someone who is generally distrustful, cautious, and possibly even suspicious (of me?). I don't think she really wants to be in the study, but she did say, "Okay" today after I explained all that it entailed, once again. I became kind of nervous when I talked to Rachel outside the classroom. I hate to admit it, but the girl has all the power here. She can change her mind, say no, and then what? I really want her in the study.

Rachel was, by far, the most challenging participant to get to know, and interview, due to her cautious, deliberate, and guarded nature. When I first approached her about participating in the study, she reacted with complete surprise. In fact, her exact words were: "You know my name? And you want me to be in your research?" I was just as surprised at her reaction, and I did not know what to make of it. Soon afterward, however, I realized, of the class sections I observed, developing relationships with the GT students was difficult in comparison to the other class sections. At times, it was hard to strike up
conversations with them, or assist them, without feeling intrusive or disruptive. Moreover, the GT students, were considerably more cliquish than students in the other sections, and generally so engrossed in their work (and conversations with one another), they seemed oblivious to my presence in the class.

Fieldnotes: 11/30/95

O.C. It's amazing how being absent almost a week and a half [Thanksgiving holiday] affects the rapport here; I feel like I'm starting over. Rachel just never even sees me as someone who comes in every week. I think I've been truly invisible to her. She seems caught up in her own world (schoolwork, school activities, peers— busy, busy, busy!), but then again, so are the majority of the kids here.

Clearly, Rachel's reaction was not unwarranted; it actually prompted me to recognize that although I felt like I knew everyone to some extent (by memorizing the seating chart, I knew all of their names, wrote my observations about them in a personalized way in fieldnotes, greeted them in a friendly manner, and tried to be helpful when I could get involved in their learning), some may not have felt they knew enough about me, or my research intentions—at least not enough to leap into it without giving it considerable thought. Thus, while I perceived Rachel as the "outspoken one" in the class who liked to play devil's advocate with her peers and teacher, I had no idea what her thoughts were regarding me, if, indeed, she had any.

Rachel's responses to my questionnaire, my observations of her in class, and Mrs. Chavana's identification of Rachel as "one of her brightest students" were indicators she would probably be a good participant. She had several at-risk factors such as belonging to a minority group and living in a single-parent household. Her mother was raising Rachel alone while her husband lived in a city more than 200 miles away. Additionally, Mrs. Longoria worked until 5:00 or
5:30 everyday; therefore, Rachel typically came home to an empty household. Yet, despite these circumstances, Rachel's school records revealed a history of academic success spanning from kindergarten to date. She passed every standardized test she ever took with high scores, and made straight As in her ten years of schooling. Unlike Mary and Lupita, who were placed in Regular and Advanced courses in junior high, Rachel was placed in Advanced courses in the 6th and 7th grades, and all GT courses in 8th grade.

Allow me to describe Rachel. She is tall and slender, like her father, standing at 5'9" and weighing in at about 125 lbs. She has straight, medium brown, shoulder-length hair, large brown eyes, and olive skin. A pair of blue jeans, a tee shirt or knit top, and a pair of black, lace-up, ankle boots make up her usual school attire. Her style is simple, contemporary, and urban. Rachel never wears skirts, dresses, or anything too girlish to school, nor is she overly concerned with having perfect hair or flawless makeup, like many of the girls in the GT section. She is unassuming, easy-going, and refreshingly "real." Conducting interviews was my primary means of getting to know Rachel, and they usually took place in the Longoria household after school without her mother present.

Journal Entry: 12/19/95

Rachel lives in a lower middle-class neighborhood with her mother in a small, red brick veneer house on a corner street a few blocks behind Pizza Hut. Outside, I noticed a few shrubs decorated with white Christmas lights. The house was dark inside— two small lamps were on, yet the lighting was dim. Rachel's friend (and neighbor), Crystal, was visiting, so she was our witness for the oral script and the other HSR forms. I found myself talking a lot to Rachel— too much, perhaps. I do that a great deal with her— a nervous habit. Silence seems to be the enemy for me. I don't really know why. I guess I want Rachel to like me and trust me. I want her to open up like the other girls. Her silence is hard for me because I think she thinks this whole thing is so stupid. I wonder what...
she really feels about all this, and I intend to find out at some point when
the time is right.

In Rachel's profile, she describes several aspects of her life such as her
relationship with her parents, her methods of coping with problems, the role
school plays in her life now and in her plans for the future. She begins with the
following description of herself:

I'm very outgoing... and open-minded. I work a lot. I'm nice and helpful
too... I'm talkative; sometimes I go overboard a bit... I don't know,
sometimes I'm a little too helpful. Like helping people out with their
problems or something. Like getting too involved in their problems when
I should stay away... It's sometimes that I get involved in other problems
that I really don't look into mine...

People tell me I'm funny, but people laugh at me and I'm just like, you
know, "What did I say?" I'm basically like that all the time... I'm pretty
much the same with everybody... I always try to be myself... I'm a very
good listener... I try very hard to practice what I preach...

My brother's name is Dustin Longoria. He's 24. My mom's name is
Minerva Longoria and she's 44. And my dad's name is Alonzo Longoria
and he's 44. I'm going to be 15... I love them—my parents... I don't know,
they're there. They feed me and clothe me, and all that stuff... I know
people that are really different when they're with their parents and their
parents are really strict and everything. And I'm not different with
anybody. It's a mutual thing... They basically let me do what I need to do
or whatever... They don't really think I'm stressed out or anything. Like if
I have a whole bunch of homework and I need to wash dishes, my mom
will make me do it, you know? Even like if I have a whole bunch to do...

I don't really go out and tell everybody my problems... I just think them
out... I don't have to go out and ask people, "What do you think?" I just
think for myself (firmly)... My mom will like try to, like, you know? She
knows a lot of what goes on. She asks me all the time... I don't really have
any big problems though...

[My mother] almost finished college, but I think she needed one more
hour or two more. Like another class to finish? She didn't get around to it
because she had me... She'd check to see our homework sometimes [when
we were little]... If I'm on the phone a long, long, time she'll like say, "Get
off the phone." She never set a limit... She never said [that I could or couldn't join any school organizations or clubs]...

[My parents] just sort of expect it (good grades). My mom doesn't even look at my report card anymore. I'll just say, "I got my report card." She's like, "Oh just leave it on the table."... Well, my dad's very different. Every once in a while, he'll like take the report card and show it to his friends or something. And like when I was in junior high, I was like, "Okay."...

[When my father moved] I was sad at first, but I got used to it. We used to go to Laredo all the time cause my Grandma lives in Laredo, so... [Dad] was here all last week, you know... and he calls us... When I was younger, he used to like, my mom would work and he used to take care of me. And he used to own a store and so he wouldn't take me to his store, but he would take me around you know?... his errands, like when I was like, six. And then, I would go to my grandma's house. My other grandma who's here in Amistad. But then, my mom quit work, so I stayed too. And then, she went back. (softly) And then he went to Laredo. And I was like, "I don't even like Laredo!"... My mom says she wants to move to Dallas because all of my aunts, her sisters, live over there. And she wants to move there, but she wants to wait till I graduate...

You know, in third grade, my best friend moved away... I made my mom buy me a dog... [When I was twelve, some friends who were neighbors moved away] and my mother didn't like them. They were way older than me, but they told me I was mature for my age... Well, I guess they were [older], but they didn't seem that old... I just accepted it (their moving away)...

My best friend is Crystal (next door neighbor) and I have a best friend who's a guy. Art. He lives over there. They are like closest friends... I have friends in there (classes) that I talk to, but they're not my best friends... [I go to Art for emotional support] because I know he will listen to me... He'll understand... He's only a year or year and a half older, so, well, maybe that's it... They, (other friends) won't understand me as well as he would. And like, I don't know, I didn't know who to go to when I needed to talk to somebody...

[My favorite subject is] biology... I like it now... I don't fully understand it- some of it... I'm not really finding my classes a real challenge right now... I was proud when I went into GT because I didn't think that I was going to make it... Like, last year, I had all GT classes and it wasn't that hard... They (teachers) have to ask you. You have to be asked. Like during elementary, they only asked three people. They only asked me in first grade. In seventh grade, I said no, and in 8th and 9th, I said yes...
Sometimes I put things off, but I always finish... I don't like, study; I do the homework... I'll look at some of the notes cause sometimes they have some of the things to do. I'll look at it and look at it, and before the test, I look at it again...

I don't have, like role models. I think people are like, well, they're cool. I don't like, "Oh my God! I want to be like you!"... But there are certain things about people that— it's like, "Wow, that's pretty cool!" But not like everything, just certain things...

Sometimes if I don't understand what I'm doing, I'm like, "Uh, I can't do this," but not really. I usually think I can do it, you know...

Sometimes I have to think about [my problems] for a while before I can deal with them...

[At school], I'm in drama— ever since 7th grade... and oh, CCD! I'm gonna be in yearbook next year and UIL... I have to think about which events for a while... I don't know yet... [I have friends who are in UIL], but I never joined...

I think I'll probably go to college... I don't know, I don't want to go to any colleges in Texas (firmly)... Mom says it's fine; she says if I were accepted, she's fine with it...

I have found that if you plan things out, it really doesn't work that way. So I guess my [philosophy in life] is that if something happens, you just deal with it... Just take it as it comes...

I learned quickly that Rachel is not the type of person who feels comfortable talking about her life and her feelings to a relative stranger. It took some time for her to warm up to me. In fact, she was the only case study participant who expressed apprehensiveness and uneasiness with the interview process. Sometimes she showed it with comments such as: "This is sort of different for me"; "I don't know exactly what to say on some of those things"; "I guess it's stuff you don't really think about"; "I don't know. I've never thought about that." Initially, it seemed to me that Rachel was operating under the notion
that her answers to the questions I posed had "right" answers. But I soon realized this was not exactly the case.

Based on my observations of her in class and conversations with Mrs. Chavana and her mother, I discovered Rachel typically likes to know exactly what is required of her. This need for clarity manifested when I asked her general questions. She seemed to need concrete examples, or context, in order to respond with a deep understanding of my questions, and with more targeted, focused responses. This kind of demand on my part was sometimes exhausting, and it did not produce very rich data inasmuch as Rachel responded to these elaborate examples in no more than two or three sentences. In short, Rachel's response style was economical and direct, with little elaboration.

For instance, I asked Rachel if she ever sought opportunities to learn and to grow as a person. She did not understand the question, so I provided her with an example. Since Rachel's favorite subject is biology, I created a scenario where a representative from SeaWorld of Texas was going to talk to any interested students in Amistad City High School who were interested in summer internships. Would she go, during class time, to the library, and listen to what the representatives had to say? She said, "I probably wouldn't go." I asked her to provide me a reason why she would not, and she said, "I don't know, I just wouldn't." Then, I asked if she felt she needed more information, and she said she would. Next, I asked her if it was fair to say that she didn't seek opportunities to learn and grow as a person, but she would take opportunities if they were offered to her. She said, "Yeah, I think so," and left it at that.

I was unsatisfied with this response, so I gave her a "for instance." I asked, "What if the representative offered you a job position at SeaWorld over the summer— all expenses paid, but no salary, just job experience and something you
could add to your college application. Would you take the internship? She stated, "I might think twice about not getting paid, but I might actually think about it." Ultimately, I learned that Rachel, is a contemplator. She simply needs sufficient time to think about something before she feels ready to commit to it (e.g., such as enrolling in the GT program, getting involved in extracurricular events like UIL, and becoming part of this study).

Other things I was unable to fit into this profile included Rachel's views on drug use: "I think it's sort of a waste of time because you're over there, you do the drug, you're happy for a while, and it's over. That's it." She says she is not racially prejudiced or surrounded by it, but some people in school do "make fun of gay people, and maybe because I know gay people, and it's like, they're not really different." Rachel is a virgin, and says most of her friends who have had sex tell her it is not worth it: "And I can see that because there's no real point unless you're really in love or something." Finally, Rachel believes in God and describes Him as someone "who is always there, you know, helping you out and stuff like that."

Parents and Home Life

Journal Entry: 12/19/95

Mrs. Longoria is an attractive woman in her forties, of medium height and build with short dark brown hair, large brown eyes, and olive skin. She speaks primarily in English, and although her name is Minerva, she goes by Minnie. Her house has a Spanish style decor with a combination of casual contemporary furniture and a few antique furniture pieces that I openly admired. It is clean, uncluttered, and neat. Minnie Longoria works as an office manager, or comptroller, of a small business in a neighboring city. She was very cooperative and interested in what I had to say about the research.

Minnie Longoria described her pregnancy with Rachel as "normal" in every way. Conceiving their daughter was not a planned decision, so it was a bit of a surprise to the Longorias when they discovered they were going to have
another child ten years after the birth of their only son, Dustin. Mrs. Longoria admitted, "I didn't really want another one, but my husband did, so we got pregnant, but we did not plan it, really." She described Rachel as a "crybaby" who liked lots of attention as an infant and as a small child.

My son was never like that. He was totally different from Rachel. He's real quiet. And she's like her dad, real outspoken and real demanding of attention... She's always been that way. When she was little, I put her in that daycare over here at Saint Luke's... And she would cry all the time. In fact, the teacher told me to take her home. So I just stayed home [with her]... She just wasn't ready. That's how come I didn't expect her to do so good [in school], but she did!... I wanted her to go [to daycare] because she was too attached to me. And my son was too, but I didn't want them to be that attached to me that they weren't able to deal with school...

Describing Rachel's home life as "family oriented," Mrs. Longoria said she stayed home with Dustin and Rachel until each of them were school age and ready to start school, while Mr. Longoria worked at his business-- a convenience store. Her decision to quit her job was the right choice both times for Mrs. Longoria because she really could not count on anybody to take care of them the way she wanted them to be cared for:

I remember I had Rachel in a daycare and I would go pick her up and you know how she is such a crybaby? (we laugh) She was very, uh... She demonstrated everything to me, and when I would go pick her up at the daycare, she was so quiet. She was sitting there. And I thought, "What the hell are they doing to you baby?" And so I said, "Forget it, I'm just going to stay home."

The family's living situation changed three years ago; however, when Rachel was 11 years old and her father moved to Laredo to work as a security guard supervisor at a bank branch. This was not an easy transition by any means:
We're separated... Just separated... It's been two years, no, almost three, since I've been working at William's Construction... It's just hard to adjust because you start thinking, "Gosh, what's going on?" (she laughs). And then you ask him to just tell you the truth, "What's going on?" And they keep telling you they still love us, so what can you do? You just accept it and go on...

The other day, he came and stayed for two weeks and we were over here, "When's he leaving? When's he leaving?" (laughs) We love him, but you get used to certain things and... it's sad but you get used to something and he goes, "What's going on? What's changing around here?" [and I tell him] "Just start picking up after yourself because it's not the same anymore" (laughs).

Mrs. Longoria says Rachel is closer to her father than her son is "because he's always babied her and all that" and "they're just more alike." She describes her own relationship with her daughter as "a good one... it's close and a fairly good relationship." She admits to being "real strict and real old-fashioned" because that's the way she was raised:

I tell her, you should be lucky because my family was real poor. I mean we were thirteen and only my dad worked, so I tell her "be happy."... We're from Central City, but everyone's moved away, and I'm the only one left out here. So when we take off for vacation, that's where we go—to visit my family.... Sometimes that's probably why my husband says that I put my family in front of him, but I say, "You gotta deal with that one" (laughs).

[Rachel and I] go out a lot. We go out to eat; we go to church. I don't go out anywhere so that I can be here to watch out for them (Rachel and Crystal). Crystal's dad is too liberated (chuckles). So I have to keep an eye on them... He's divorced, so they hang out together, so as you can see, I have to keep an eye on them... I'm glad, I mean, it's good, but sometimes I have to deal with [Crystal's] problems too, and I go, "Ughhh!" (laughs).

Financially, Mrs. Longoria said, the family was "better off" when her husband was home and working at his business: "He had the store and we were doing better. Of course, I didn't have to work really. Now, I have to work."
Unfortunately, the store went out of business during the 1980's economic recession, and Mr. Longoria was out of work for several months before he procured employment in Laredo. He asked the family to move there to be with him, but Mrs. Longoria, Rachel, and Dustin were unwilling to do so. I asked Mrs. Longoria if the move and financial constraints affected Rachel emotionally, academically, or otherwise, and this was her reply:

No. It didn't affect her at school. She dealt with it pretty good... There was a time when she would come up and say, "I want to buy those Girbaud jeans and all that stuff." And I said, "Sorry, I ain't got all that money to buy that. It's so expensive! And so she accepted it...

In terms of coping strategies, Mrs. Longoria remarked, she "deals with [her problems] pretty easily by herself," but sometimes she calls on her mother to comfort her.

Because that's the way we were all brought up. Like my mom and us, you know? So that's the way, I taught her... And so, that's what she does... Once in a while, she comes and she goes, "Mother hug me," and she wants me to hug her and stuff (laughs). "Settle down, girlfriend!" I tell her.

Rachel's mother mentioned one instance that caused Rachel stress in her life occurred one year and a half ago, when she experienced her first "crush" on an older boy who lived in the neighborhood and moved away:

I think she kind of had a crush on a little boy and I kind of, "Whew!" (laughs). And thank God they moved away! They used to come bothering them (Crystal and Rachel), and they had an even older brother, and I finally had to tell them, "Leave the girls alone. Go find yourself somebody that's older and knows what they are doing. These girls are too young for you guys!"... She kept saying, "We're just friends, we're just friends." But I said, "Uhh huh? Go find some other friends." I think she dealt with it pretty good. She didn't tell me off. You know how kids are these days, if you stop them from doing something. They're gonna rebel or something. She just accepted it. I think she did pretty good... She just
told me I wasn't fair... She behaved pretty well, and just dealt with it.

Recognizing that raising her children alone has not been easy, Mrs. Longoria reflected: "Sometimes I say, "I don't know if I can keep doing this," but then I say, "Hey! Been doing it, and I can do it. But it's hard." As the main provider of the family, she concludes, "I guess my husband's never given me any problems, so maybe that's one of the reasons, he's here (i.e., still married and part of their lives). The only thing is that he's gone, but he helps me a lot (financially)." Mrs. Longoria even shared her own coping strategy with me:

I keep it to myself. I'm the same way (as Rachel). I just keep it to myself, go to the bathroom and scream my head off! (laughs). I don't really like to tell my kids, how, if I'm having problems and stuff. I've never been that way, to tell my mom or somebody? I deal with it myself... You have to deal with it and face it. I mean, "What can my parents do? Why bother them with my problems or bother his parents (husband's) with my problems?...

Mrs. Longoria identified two things that gave her the most pride concerning her daughter—Rachel's history of academic excellence and her overall behavior as a well-mannered, respectful, and mature teenager. She is very proud of Rachel's efforts to do well in school, and expects her to strive to her utmost capacity. Moreover, Mrs. Longoria is quite supportive of her daughter's decision to study at a university outside the state of Texas, maintaining the following:

Fine with me... "As long as you know what you're doing. It's not going to be that easy"... She's like, "I have you here to help me out anyway."... I tell her, that's true, but um, [she's] got to be careful... I want her to continue her education because that's the only way she's gonna be able to have a good job.
**Teachers and School Life**

During my weekly visits in Mrs. Chavana's GT class, Rachel proved to be one of the most vocal students in the class during whole group, small group, and paired discussions or activities. At times Rachel was so adamant about getting her points across to her peers, I noted Mrs. Chavana telling her to "keep it down Rachel" or warning "you're getting too loud." In a formal interview with Mrs. Chavana, she described Rachel's growth as a student in her class in terms of her expressiveness:

Rachel has always been very mature about her— in her personality and way of being. She hasn't really gone through any change in that way. I think she's a little more expressive now. I think she's a little more comfortable with being assertive with her answers, her responses, even her writing responses. Because in the beginning, they (her class) come in and they're kind of wanting me to prod them along, wanting me to help them with the answers. And it seems like she's a little more confident today...

When she gives me answers, or even debating a point with me. She's a little more comfortable that it's okay to debate with the teacher. Or to go against the teacher if you have a strong viewpoint, and I think a lot of it has been because I've given them permission to do so. And it seems like they were a little more hesitant at the beginning. Because whatever I said seemed to be law. And I wanted them to graduate from that level and she's doing better that way... I want them to pick a bone at a time if they have to, and a lot of times, they'll stray off and I hope that they catch the mistake. Cause I want them to really say, "Well, we're sure about it" versus "Well since you've now changed your tone, it's now your way." I really want them to defend what they've learned, and you know, what their conviction is.

I asked Mrs. Chavana to identify where she would place Rachel on a one to ten scale, one being most likely to fail, and ten being most likely to succeed with a very high average in her class:
Definitely a 10. She's very self-motivated. She doesn't settle for mediocre responses... I mean, even when they're working in groups, I've noticed she's the one that's leading the group discussions. She's the one that makes them kind of lean over to her viewpoint. She's very strong about her point of view...

In fact, one day she walked out of my class saying, "You're not fair," which I kind of welcomed readily because that meant that she wasn't settled with what I had to say. And I said, "We'll continue." And we did continue it the next day. She came in giving me more information about it. And I said, "Your viewpoints are good, but you have to back up and look at what the character is doing." But she's very strong about her ideas and she'll sit there and argue it politely, but she'll at least defend her convictions, so I think, given that, she's going to do well everywhere.

Finally, Mrs. Chavana said she sees Rachel exhibiting resilience in the following ways:

I've never seen her bogged down by anything, so I imagine she's gonna bounce back from anything that comes her way. Cause she's very strong about that, you know, she's not hesitant about asking questions. She'll also ask, if something's bothering her, she'll always ask to clarify it. Although she's very selective about her questions. She's not one of those that will ask the silly questions or just want to get attention off her talking. She really measures what she wants to say and what she has to ask. But most of the time, when you see her, she's very... She's thinking always. It seems as if, her thinking process is always [on]... You see her looking at me and she'll look away and she's thinking about what I just said, and then, if she has something to add to it, she'll, she'll speak up. So I think that nothing's going to ever really phase her. She's very strong about her senesce of being, so... you know, I think resiliency for her is not going to be a problem, bouncing back from a problem. She'll always take care of it. She's just really strong, you know.6

**Identifying Themes: Interpretation and Analysis**

The following themes emerged from Rachel's profile:

1. Has a positive self-concept/strong sense of self
2. Envisions a positive future
3. Copes with problems by "thinking things out"
4. Accepts situations that are beyond her control
5. Takes time to think before making important decisions

Rachel's positive self-concept is evident in the way she described herself. Descriptors such as "outgoing," "open-minded," "nice and helpful," "talkative," "pretty much the same with everybody," and "a very good listener," indicate Rachel's general perception of herself is positive. Moreover, declarations such as "I try very hard to practice what I preach" and "I always try to be myself"— shows Rachel has a strong sense of self. Mrs. Chavana's observation below also supports the emergence of this theme:

I think that nothing's going to ever really phase her. She's very strong about her sense of being, so you know, I think, you know, resiliency for her is not going to be a problem, bouncing back from a problem. She'll always take care of it.

In addition, Mrs. Longoria's description of her daughter as a source of pride because she "does good in school," "really does a lot [helps out at home]," and "minds me pretty good," as well as being "real outspoken and very friendly with everybody," and "mature," suggest Rachel's positive self-concept is shaped by her home identity as a good daughter. Furthermore, Rachel's social status at school is also connected to Rachel's positive perception of herself:

I'm not really finding my classes a real challenge right now... I was proud when I went into GT because I didn't think that I was going to make it... Like, last year, I had all GT classes and it wasn't that hard... They (teachers) have to ask you. You have to be asked...

At fifteen, Rachel envisions a positive future for herself, which includes going
away to college. She is undecided about a career choice, but she thinks it will be related to science or medicine. With her mother's blessing, Rachel is determined to attend a reputable out-of-state university for a challenging and exciting college experience. Mrs. Longoria is certain Rachel will be capable of achieving this goal and will support her daughter's decision when the time comes because "that's the only way she's gonna be able to have a good job."

A third theme is Rachel's method of coping by "thinking things out":

I don't really go out and tell everybody my problems... I just think them out... I don't have to go out and ask people, "What do you think?" I just think for myself (firmly)... My mom will like try to, you know? She knows a lot of what goes on. She asks me all the time... I don't really have any big problems though...

Mrs. Longoria suggests Rachel's coping style is something passed down from one generation to the next in her family: "She deals with [her problems] pretty easily by herself... That's the way we were all brought up. Like my mom and us, you know? So that's the way I taught her... And so, that's what she does." On rare instances where Rachel does not feel she can handle a problem on her own, and she needs emotional support, she goes to an older friend, Art, who "understands" her.

This particular coping style relates to a fourth theme— Rachel's tendency to accept things that are beyond her control. For instance, her father's decision to move away when she was eleven years old was a significant event in her life that Rachel learned to accept rather easily. Her fond memories of her father taking care of her as a young child reminded Rachel of how his move made her "sad at first," but she "got used to it." As her mother stated, and her school records reveal, this major change in Rachel's life did not have a negative impact on her academic performance. Significantly, Mrs. Longoria reported her husband visits
have become less frequent over the years, and it has come to the point where her children sometimes ask her, "When is he leaving?" because they are so accustomed to functioning as a family without him.

Another example of Rachel's tendency to accept situations that are beyond her control includes the incident where Mrs. Longoria forbade Rachel to associate with the older neighborhood boy/friend who told Rachel she was "mature for her age." Mrs. Longoria confronted the young man, he and his family moved away, and Rachel learned to accept the situation. Finally, after her father's move to Laredo, Rachel learned to accept the fact her mother could not afford to buy her expensive designer jeans, and she would have to be satisfied with the clothing her mother could afford to buy her.

A final theme stemming from Rachel's profile is her propensity to take time to think before making important decisions. When Rachel is confronted with a new challenge or opportunity, such as joining U.L.L.\textsuperscript{7}, taking GT courses, obtaining general information on a summer internship, or becoming part of a research study, she takes her time to consider whether she is really, truly, and completely up for the challenge. Rachel's tendency to contemplate for a considerable amount of time is due to several factors. First, she does not commit herself to participating in something unless she feels she is ready and able to succeed in it. Secondly, since her mother has never really encouraged her to do more than her best, she does not face extraordinary high parental expectations or pressures to do more than she is already doing. Her mother has empowered her by allowing Rachel to decide what she wants to do to enhance her general education. Aware of her power to decide, Rachel is careful not to overextend herself to the point where her grades might suffer. Thirdly, Rachel's proclivity to take substantial time when faced with important decisions has to do with her family's ability to
support her decisions emotionally and financially. She is well aware of her mother's busy lifestyle and her family's budget, and she will not impinge on either one of these things.

It appears Rachel's main strategy for coping with problems, encountering new challenges/opportunities, and accepting situations that are beyond her control is, simply, to think. Her great strength as a daughter, a student, and a friend is that she is always in the moment—always thinking, learning, and striving to understand the whole picture. As her English teacher poignantly observes:

She really measures what she wants to say and what she has to ask. But most of the time, when you see her, she's very... She's thinking always. It seems as if, her thinking process is always [on]... You see her looking at me and she'll look away and she's thinking about what I just said, and then, if she has something to add to it, she'll, she'll speak up.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

COMING OUT OF THE FOG: OUTCOMES AND IMPLICATIONS

Donald Murray (1990) maintains texts teach writers skills— notably, ignorance.

The text wants ignorance, or at least innocence, a necessary naiveté which makes the ordinary extraordinary. The text often lies in the area of the unknown. "Writing is a process of dealing with not-knowing," Donald Barthelme reminds us. It is not easy to achieve true ignorance. In writing we discover what we know that we did not know that we knew, and what we now know we know may interfere with the reception of the next text. The danger is that the writing of the text makes us feel full of knowing, and it may be difficult to develop the skill of retroactive ignorance. (pp. 80-81)

On January 1, 1997, my biggest worry regarding this dissertation was not knowing how or where to begin. Under the impression I should "know" the scope and shape of this document even before writing it, I was trapped in the mindset of writing a whole dissertation. Having written throughout the research process in my fieldnotes and reflective journal, I believed I ought to know what it ultimately said about my topic. How was it possible to feel like I knew so much about it, and yet so little at the same time? Pressure mounted whenever colleagues or friends asked me about the project (particularly, about my
findings), and it was always difficult, albeit impossible, to respond with any degree of certainty. My standard line became, "I don't know. It's a work-in-progress." After repeating this phrase countless times, my confidence began to wane—that is, until I sat down and forced myself to start writing the introductory chapter.®

In retrospect, these incidents of not knowing what to say to people gave me additional incentive to begin writing. I grew weary of my inability to provide answers. My "ignorance," if you will, was actually a state of mind impelling me to write. Once started, it was not long before I discovered the process of writing in fieldnotes and journal entries had mediated my reflections of the lived experiences of my case study participants. Therefore, I concluded reflective writing would also enable me get through the dissertation. I trusted myself to be open to discovering what I knew, but could not yet articulate. Slowly, but surely, I believed I would come out of the dense, data-saturated fog that clouded my ability to see the phenomenon of resilience in a clear light. As Max Van Manen (1990) eloquently expresses:

Writing gives appearance and body to thought. And as it does, we disemboby what in another sense we already embody. However, not until we had written this down did we quite know what we knew. Writing separates the knower from the known (Ong, 1982), but it also allows us to reclaim this knowledge and make it our own in a new and more intimate manner. Writing constantly seeks to make external what somehow is internal. We come to know what we know in this dialectic process of constructing a text (a body of knowledge). It is the dialectic of inside and outside, of embodiment and disembodiment, of separation and reconciliation. (p. 127)

**Meaning and Representation in Narrative: Taking a Second Look at Design**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I chose to craft profiles and vignettes from transcriptions of conversational guided interviews with teachers, parents, and
case study participants because this method of display offered a means of managing vast amounts of data. More importantly, however, crafting profiles and vignettes provided a venue for readers to "come to know the experience of the participants through their stories" and to "allow the words to reflect [each] person's consciousness" (Seidman, 1991, p. 91). I.E. Seidman (1991), describes the narrative quality of crafted profiles and vignettes in qualitative research in the following:

The story is both the participant's and the interviewer's. It is in the participant's words, but it is crafted by the interviewer from what the participant has said. . . . What others can learn from reading a profile of a participant is as diverse as the participants we interview, the profiles we craft and organize, and the readers who read them. I have found profiles, however, to be a way to find and display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant's experience, to share the coherence the participant has expressed, and to link the individual's experience to the social and organizational context within which he or she operates. (p. 92)

As I progressed in the writing, the case studies took shape, forming an amalgamation of different voices—teachers, parents, administrators, staff members, students, and my own—resonated within the cultural backdrop reflected in school documents, state comptrollers' reports, student records, U.S. Census information, thick description, and interviews with students, teachers, parents, administrators, and staff. As Laurel Richardson (1990) reminds us in what follows:

Narrative is everywhere, present in myth, fable, short story, epic, history, comedy, painting, dance, stained glass windows, cinema, social histories, fairy tales, novels, science schema, comic strips, conversation, journal articles. . . . People link events narratively. The meaning of each event is produced by its temporal position and role in a comprehensible whole. Narratively, to answer the question, "What does something mean?" requires showing how the something contributed to the conclusion of the episode. The connections between the events is the meaning. (pp. 20-21)
The case study design is entirely compatible with the pragmatic paradigm undergirding this study (Patton, 1990), and oriented in the theoretical traditions of ethnography, phenomenology, and heuristics. The research questions guiding this inquiry conveyed my desire to come to know how perceptions of school and self play into the phenomenon of resilience among students who embody and/or experience multiple at-risk characteristics. Additionally, the questions revealed my interest in coping styles among resilient students that may have heuristic potential for adolescents, educators and parents. In essence, my concern with representations, phenomena, and meaning are reflected in my research questions listed again below:

1. What role does school play in the lives of the students in this sample?
2. How do the students in this sample view themselves and their place in the world?
3. To what extent are these students' self-concepts related to school success?
4. To what extent are these students' self-concepts shaped by their social statuses at school, identities at home, and relations with peers?
5. How do the resilient students in this sample cope with adverse life events and conditions that enable them to retain academic competence?

Conclusions of the Study: Raising the Conceptual Level

Rather than writing a summary of the research, I have opted for writing a conclusion. The distinction is clarified by Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin (1991), who contend the following:

Summaries reiterate what has been said; conclusions deal with the "so-Whats." They stimulate thought and transcend the substantive content presented earlier. Glaser recommends using the conclusion as an
opportunity to show the contribution of the work to formal theory by "brief comparative analysis with data from experience, knowledge, and the literature, and by raising the conceptual level" (Glaser 1978, 133).

(p. 165)

In each of the girls' case studies, I listed five or six themes emerging from their respective profiles. Notably, I looked for themes describing actions and conditions that seemed to facilitate resilience and could be triangulated by source (a teacher or a parent), method (participant observation, informal interviews), and/or time (beginning, middle, end of data-collection). Some themes were consistent among all three participants such as "has a positive self-concept," "envisions a positive future," and "copes with stressful situations in a variety of ways." Analyzing the cases studies in this manner was limited primarily to only one type of data (profiles crafted from interviews). Therefore, I compiled a more comprehensive list of themes from profiles and other data sources, such as participant observation fieldnotes, journal entries, formal and informal conversations and interviews with parents, teachers, and students. A list of themes, or patterns, emerging from these data, and pertaining specifically to the three case study participants, is found in Table 8.1.

Most of the actions and conditions mirrored the girls' abilities and living circumstances; however, the manner and degree to which they executed some of these actions varied. For instance, even though all three girls tended to accept and adapt to situations that [were] beyond their control, Lupita seemed to have the most difficulty with the accepting part, especially when it came to her father. In addition, Rachel did not seek opportunities to learn and grow to the extent that Lupita and Mary did because she needed more time to think before making important decisions than did the others. Finally, Mary coped with personal problems
quite differently than Lupita or Rachel, who usually dealt with their problems on
their own and rarely confided to anyone until after the fact. By contrast, Mary
tended to mask her feelings with her "perkiness," and if her problems became too
overwhelming, she looked to her friends or family members for advice and
emotional support.

Table 8.1

Themes Emerging From Three Single Case Studies of Resilient Mexican American Adolescents:
Actions and Conditions That Facilitate Resiliency

1. Live with at least one caring and responsible parent
2. Are goal-oriented
3. Cope with stressful life events in a variety of ways
4. Have positive self-concepts/high sense of self
5. Have good decision-making skills
6. Expect a positive personal future
7. Form close positive friendships
8. Maintain a close relationship with at least one parent
9. Seek opportunities to learn and grow
10. Accept and adapt to situations that are beyond their control
11. Take time to think before making important decisions
12. Believe a close family is important

Richardson's and his colleague's (1990) notion of resiliency explains the
distinctions, or variability, among some of the girls' typical actions. The authors
describe resilience as "a process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or
challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from the event" (p. 34). Defining resiliency as a process, rather than a characteristic or state-trait within the individual, Richardson and his co-authors purport "in order to become more resilient, an individual must pass through challenges, stressors, and risks, become disorganized, reorganize his or her life, learn from the experiences, and surface stronger with more coping skills and protective factors" (p. 35).

Viewed as a process, everyone has the potential to be resilient; and thus, resilience is a matter of finding personally constructive ways to cope with new challenges, stressors, and risks. Seen in this light, it is reasonable to conclude that each girl's actions and life conditions affected her potential for resilience during given points of time in her life when confronted with challenging, stressful, or risky life events. Richardson and his colleagues essentially suggest resilience is applicable to everyone because it is a basic part of life.

Several of my hunches were confirmed in the findings of this study. For instance, I thought it was likely school would play a significant role in the lives of the students in this sample, and it did. In addition, I surmised it was probable students in this sample would view themselves and their place in the world in positive terms, and they did. I also imagined self-concepts might be connected to the girls' experiences with school success. However, I could never imagine the extent to which this would be true for each participant, nor could I presume the degree to which the girls' self-concepts would be shaped by their social statuses at school, identities at home, or relations with peers. Finally, several themes emerging from the single case studies, listed in Table 8.1, confirmed my hunches about my last research question (How do the resilient students in this sample
cope with adverse life events and conditions that enable them to retain academic competence?). Based on my own life experiences, research, and literature on this subject, I imagined the girls would be goal-oriented, responsive or flexible to change, and basically, positive about themselves and their respective outlooks for the future. These instincts were all confirmed in this study.9

Donald Polkinghorne's (1988) notion of narrative configuration provides a powerful conceptual metaphor for resilience. He claims our personal identities and self-concepts are achieved through the use of "the narrative configuration":

> [W]e make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be. (p. 150).

Asserting the concept of self is "not the discovery or release of some innate T, but a construction built on other people's responses and attitudes toward a person and subject to change as these responses, inherently variable and inconsistent, change in their character," Polkinghorne concludes in order to come to "a unified and concordant self-concept and personal identity, then, the person needs to synthesize and integrate the diverse social responses he or she experiences" (p. 150).

During data-collection, I generated a great deal of data from, and about, parents and teachers, or those people who, for the girls in this sample, provide necessary "diverse social responses" needed in order to construct self-concepts. These data burgeoned many themes consisting mostly of parent and teacher actions that fostered resiliency (see Tables 8.2 & 8.3). As in Table 8.1, themes
emerged from multiple data-collection methods such as participant observation, vignettes crafted from interviews, informal conversational interviews, thick description, and reflective journal entries. Themes were consistent with the literature which identifies three general "protective factors" within the family such as caring and support, high expectations, and encouragement of children’s participation (Bernard, 1991).

Although most of the parental actions identified among the three parent informants fell into the aforementioned categories, four of them did not. They included the following: do not buffer stress for their children, stress close family ties and unity, model coping styles, and instill cultural/ethnic values in their children. In short, parents fostered resilience in ways that were entirely consistent with their cultural family values and beliefs. Murillo (1976) explains Mexican American family values and patterns as the following:

[T]he family is likely to be the single most important social unit in life. It is usually at the core of his [her] thinking and behavior and is the center from which his [her] view of the rest of the world extends. Even with respect to identification, the Chicano/[a] self is likely to take second place after the family. (p. 19)

Remarkably, these parents continued to stress close family ties and unity despite their respective marital or post-marital difficulties (i.e., The fact one parent is divorced, another has a long-distance marriage, and the last parent has settled for an unhappy marriage, did not mean their daughters were allowed to let go of their relationships, commitments, and obligations to any member(s) of their respective families). Stressful life events within the family (e.g., financial, marital, family, health, and school-related issues) were never kept from the children in any of the families studied despite the potential stress these problems may have caused. Although parents acknowledged they had all experienced
highs and lows in their family lives, they all mentioned something to the effect that this was "a normal part of life," and keeping their children from knowing the family's problems is, ultimately, a bad idea. As one parent described her daughter's childhood: "Normal as any home, with its highs and lows and everything, just what is a life journey."

All three parents attributed their respective daughters' high levels of maturity for their ages as resulting, in part, because of their inclination to be honest with the girls regarding the state of their families' affairs, especially during difficult life events. Furthermore, all three girls were expected to continue to keep a high grade point average in school, practice their extracurricular activities, and resume their usual household responsibilities despite difficult situations at home. Hence, the parents in this study generally did not buffer stress for their children.

Another interesting finding was that each case study participant adopted her parent's general coping style to a certain extent. For instance, Rachel revealed she generally coped with her problems on her own, and this was her mother's preferred strategy as well. When I asked Mrs. Longoria about it, she told me she and her siblings were raised to deal with their personal problems independently. In her words: "You have to deal with it and face it. I mean, what can my parents do? Why bother them with my problems or bother his [husband's] with my problems?". Usually cheerful and outgoing, Lupita typically became distant and silent when she was coping with a stressful life event, also typical of her mother who reacted the same way, especially when she had much to think about regarding the family business. Finally, Mary, much like her father, tended to disguise her feelings by remaining "perky" for as long as possible. If a life event became too much to cope with alone, she communicated
her problems with one or more members of her family, or a close personal friend. In short, all three parents modeled coping styles that seemed to work for their daughters, at least during the time this research was conducted.

The last, and perhaps the most significant, theme parents shared was their inclination to instill cultural/ethnic values in their children. The parents in this sample raised their daughters to respect and comply with traditional Mexican American family life which has "two basic dimensions around which the interpersonal patterns within the family are organized. The first is respect and obedience to elders and the second is male dominance" (Murillo, 1976).

Each of the girls' relationships with her father was different; nonetheless, they all shared one common aspect. Specifically, all three girls loved and accepted their fathers simply because of who they were. Whether her father was "old-fashioned" and authoritative like Mary's, lived in a city over 200 miles away like Rachel's, or was "macho" and prone to settling problems through violent means like Lupita's, the girls could not change the fact they loved their fathers and simply had to respect their parents' respective mutual decisions. Drawing on Rubel (1966), Murillo (1976) illuminates the father-child family dynamic in what follows:

In relating to his children, the father frequently serves as the disciplinarian. He assumes responsibility for the behavior of the family members in or outside of the home. Misbehavior by another family member is a direct reflection on the father even though he might not have been present at the time of the misconduct. During their earlier years the father is often permissive, warm, and close to the children. This changes significantly as each child reaches the onset of puberty. At this time, the father's behavior toward his children becomes much more reserved, authoritarian, and demanding of respect. (italics added, p. 21)

Mary, whose primary parent/caretaker was her father, respected his strong opinions against her dating at age 15, and against becoming involved in more
school activities that impinged on family and study time. Understanding her father's needs to spend time with her siblings and herself, as a family, and to protect her from taking on more than she could handle at school, Mary learned to accept her father's decisions and adapt to them. In a similar fashion, Mr. Palacios learned to accommodate some of his daughter's requests reminding himself, "this is the 90's and what I try to do is place myself in their [both daughters'] shoes at the time, when I was their age... But later on, I just keep reminding them, they're just 15 years old." In the end, Mary and her father compromised. She managed to stay active in two of her favorite extracurricular activities, and she received her father's permission to attend one or two school dances a year, so long as she kept her grades up and found a way to help pay for the expenses involved.

As Lupita's case study revealed, she was disappointed and angry with her father because he did not fit the traditional patriarchal role as the provider of the family, yet he demanded to be treated and respected as such. In her constant struggle to understand why her mother allowed her father to dictate the rules of the household when he so clearly did not deserve to do so, Lupita acknowledged her mother was "afraid a lot," explaining that although Mrs. Garza admitted to her husband's personal faults, she accepted him because this was often just a part of being married. In addition, Lupita said she did not think her mother was capable of envisioning herself as a happy divorced woman. Murillo's (1976) depiction of the traditional Mexican American wife-mother is illuminating here. He states the "wife-mother is supposed to be completely devoted to her husband. Her role is to serve the needs of her husband, support his actions and decisions, and take care of the home and children" (p. 21). Mrs. Garza illustrates her devotion to her husband in the following:

I tell them, look mijitas, your father is good. Your father has never given
you a bad example. Your father is sick, he can't give you what you would like him to give you. And he's not a drunk... He doesn't like that. He doesn't have any vices, nothing like that. We're just working people and we work and that's all.

Table 8.2

Themes Emerging From Three Single Case Studies of Resilient Mexican American Adolescents:
Parental Actions That Foster Resiliency

Parents Who . . .

1. Do not buffer stress for their children
2. Have high and realistic expectations
3. Are supportive emotionally, financially, and academically
4. Value education
5. Stress close family ties and unity
6. Set and enforce rules
7. Instill cultural/ethnic values in their children
8. Model coping strategies
9. Show pride in their children's successes and talents
10. Communicate with their children openly and regularly

Ultimately, Lupita resolved to respect her mother's views about her parents' marital state, to accept that she was not the reason her parents have an unstable marriage, and to psychologically break away from her father for her own emotional well-being. Berlin & Davis (1989) define this "process of breaking
away from the family focus on the dysfunctional behavior" as adaptive distancing (cited in Bernard, 1991). Mrs. Garza, in turn, respected Lupita's decision to avoid Mr. Garza, compromised with her daughter about creating more manageable workloads at home and the family business for both of them, and finally, recognized Lupita's need to spend more time with her, as well as more time on her studies.

Finally, Rachel's case study revealed her mother's efforts to instill cultural/ethnic values in her as well. Despite the fact her father had lived in another city for over three years and visited less frequently than he used to, Rachel's home life was "family-oriented" in her mother's words. Describing herself as, "real strict and real old-fashioned," Mrs. Longoria said she raised Rachel the way she, herself, was raised. As a result, Rachel dealt with life events, such as her father's move, "pretty good" on her own "because that's the way we were all brought up. Like my mom and us, you know? So that's what I taught her... And so that's what she does." Mrs. Longoria, like Mrs. Garza, exemplified the Mexican American wife-mother inasmuch as she supported her husband's decisions despite the emotional and financial burdens it placed on her. Furthermore, having taken the brunt of the financial responsibilities of the household, and having raised her children alone over the past three years gave Mrs. Longoria pause from time to time:

Sometimes I say, "I don't know if I can keep doing this," but then I say, "Hey! Been doing it, and I can do it." But it's hard... I guess my husband's never given me any problems, so maybe that's one of the reasons, he's here (i.e., they are still married and he's part of their lives). The only thing is that he's gone, but he helps me a lot [financially].

It became evident that Rachel, Mary, and Lupita saw strength in their primary parents' perceptions of traditional Mexican American family life (roles,
responsibilities, acceptable behavior). Each parent's demonstrations of resilience in everyday living, in essence, fostered resilient behavior among their daughters. Moreover, a mutual recognition among parents and their daughters that "life is not easy for anyone" and "we all need to do the best we can to achieve what we want and/or need," facilitated by a willingness to communicate and compromise, resulted in understanding and respect among parents and daughters. Whether it be obtaining a higher GPA, expanding the family business, going to a school dance, getting ready for Dad's visit, joining another school organization, or paying the monthly household bills, parents acknowledged and respected things that were important to their daughters, and daughters, in turn, reciprocated.

Significance of the Study: Implications for Research and Practice

As previously mentioned, the paucity of research about Mexican American adolescent girls and schooling despite alarming high levels of school attrition, alone, indicates the importance of this study since it adds to this neglected area of research. By examining the phenomenon of resilience amid a small sample of adolescent girls who have multiple at-risk characteristics, my intention was to write case studies that had heuristic potential for readers who were open to discovering aspects about resilience that might generate possibilities for their own students, especially those identified at-risk due to personal characteristics such as poverty, minority group status, low educational attainment by one or both parents, and living in a single-parent household.

Secondly, this research is significant because it contests a completely misguided, yet still common, assumption—that Mexican Americans do not value education.11 Third, it rejects the epidemiological model of education, or deficiency model, wherein "risk factors or predictors that are statistically most
often associated with school failure or dropping out, are student background characteristics such as minority status, poverty, and language difference" and "school people see their functions as that of an intervening treatment (Richardson et al., 1989, p. 4)." Indeed, this study challenges the prevalent theme running through risk research; specifically, that being an ethnic minority is a barrier to academic competence.

Clearly, an in-depth exploration of resilience processes among adolescent girls could not have excluded exploration of self-concepts as they were shaped by social statuses at school, identities at home, and roles with peers. As Polkinghorne reminds us, "[Self] is a construction built on other people’s responses and attitudes toward a person and subject to change as these responses, inherently variable and inconsistent change in their character" (p. 150). The girls in this study synthesized diverse social responses among teachers, parents, and peers in their configurations of their resilient selves.

I contend more studies ought to explore the interplay among multiple risks and factors that foster resiliency on three or more levels—the students, their families, and the larger social contexts of schools and communities. In addition, these studies must focus more closely on actions, or protective factors, in families and schools that foster resilience among children and adolescents. Moreover, parents and teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge that particular aspects of their family lives and classroom practices do foster resilience, while other actions and conditions hinder the potential for resilience-building and should be avoided.

Although all three teacher informants in this sample cared about their students' well-being and academic development, had a high sense of responsibility toward their students, and felt pressured by administrators to foster success for all of them, Mrs. Chayana was the only one who fostered
resiliency in her teaching. Therefore, the list of themes compiled in Table 8.3 emerged mostly from her classroom where I conducted many hours of participant observation.

Table 8.3

Themes Emerging From Three Single Case Studies of Resilient Mexican American Adolescents:

Teacher Actions That Foster Resiliency

Teachers Who . . . .

1. Care about their students' well-being and academic development
2. Have a high sense of responsibility and efficacy toward their students
3. Foster resilience in their teaching (e.g., teaching life skills such as time management, goal setting, study strategies, assessing future career plans)
4. Set high and realistic expectations for their students
5. Create a positive, learner-centered environment
6. Provide interesting lessons that promote critical thinking
7. Are warm, caring, and approachable
8. Encourage students to set goals and accomplish them
9. Provide opportunities for students to interact in cooperative learning groups and assume important leadership roles
10. Design lessons that are age-appropriate and meaningful to students

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, Mrs. C. had the most fluid notion of the concept of at-risk, contesting the more commonly held views based on epidemiological models of education. She recognized that all students were
susceptible to risk when "distracters" got in the way of their goals, and invited opportunities for student reflection and discussion regarding ways that students could be resilient in the face of adversity. Indeed, Mrs. Chavana's teacher actions in her upper-level English classes were consistent with Henderson and Milstein's (1996) six steps to fostering resiliency which include: increasing bonding, setting clear, consistent boundaries, teaching life skills, providing caring and support, setting and communicating high expectations, and providing opportunities for meaningful participation (pp. 26-30).

Henderson & Milstein (1996) suggest, resiliency-building in schools applies to every population of students, certainly not just those of Mexican descent or those who attend economically disadvantaged or at-risk schools. Their model is limited, however, insofar as it is designed especially for administrators and educators. The role of family in fostering resiliency is alluded to only once, and fails to consider varying cultural or ethnic beliefs and values that may enhance or impede schoolwide efforts. Other than suggesting parents ought to be "partners" of schools in schoolwide efforts to promote resiliency, the authors do not address or consider the enormous power parents have at home. In short, they fail to see that resiliency-building begins at home.

For the fifteen year-old girls in this study, all Mexican Americans of low socioeconomic status, full of potential and promise, resiliency is ingrained in their very lives.12 Their psychological border crossings are reflected in the words of Anzaldúa (1987) in her depiction of the new mestiza:

In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. (p. 79)
Generalizability and Validity

This study can be generalized in two ways—internally (i.e., *internal generalizability* referring to "the generalizability of a conclusion within the setting, or group studied," Maxwell, 1996, p. 97) and/or naturally (i.e., *naturalistic generalizations*). For instance, as the case studies here reveal, one may internally generalize that cultural aspects of the girls' lives fostered resiliency and, in turn, supported the girls' efforts to perform at academically high levels at school (Maxwell, 1996). Moreover, one may also make naturalistic generalizations as Stake (1995) explains:

> [P]eople can learn much that is general from single cases. They do that partly because they are familiar with other cases and they add this one in, thus making a slightly new group from which to generalize, a new opportunity to modify old generalizations. . . . Naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves. It is not clear that generalizations arrived at in two quite different ways are kept apart in anyway in the mind. One set of generalizations through two doors. (p. 85)

Any discussion of generalizability in qualitative research ultimately brings forth discussion of the concept of *validity*. Stake (1995) provides a list of things to assist the case study researcher in the validation of naturalistic generalization that I was careful to consider and follow through in this study. These are found in Appendix F. Additionally, Donald E. Polkinghorne (1988) clarifies validity in narrative research in the following long, but noteworthy, quote:

> In narrative research, "valid" retains its ordinary meaning of well-grounded and supportable. This ordinary meaning is distinguished from two more limited meanings. The first comes from the context of formal logic, where "valid" describes a conclusion that follows the rules of logic and is correctly drawn from the premises. The second is used in measurement theory, where "validity" refers to the relationship between the measuring instrument and the concept it is attempting to measure. A
valid finding in narrative research, however, although it might include conclusions based on formal logic and measurement data is based on the more general understanding of validity as a well-grounded conclusion. . . . Narrative research does not produce conclusions of certainty, the ideal of formal science with its closed system of mathematics and formal logic. Narrative research, by retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human existence, operates in an area that is not limited by formal systems and their particular type of rigor. . . . The conclusions of narrative research remain open-ended. New information or argument may convince scholars that the conclusion is an error or that another conclusion is more likely. Narrative research, then, uses the ideal of a scholarly consensus as the test of verisimilitude rather than the test of logical or mathematical validity. . . . Reliability in narrative study usually refers to the dependability of the data, and validity to the strength of the analysis of the data. (176).

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, it is limited by gender. All three case study participants and their teachers were female. Secondly, all three case study participants are Mexican American, so the study is limited by ethnic category. Third, all case studies were conducted in one school in one area of the country, The Rio Grande Valley, so it is limited to one educational setting and a particular geographic region. Fourth, the study is limited to one teacher's classroom to a large extent, since the case study participants that remained resilient took Honors and Gifted and Talented English. Fifth, although I have collected enough data for writing six single case studies, this study is limited to a sample of three complete case studies. Finally, data-collection took place over the course of one year, so the study is limited by time.

Epilogue

Having introduced the voices of six girls who make up this study, I only had the privilege to write three of their stories. The untold stories are just as important, but not as easy to tell because unlike Mary, Lupita, and Rachel, Jaisa,
Annabel, and Skye did not retain academic competence their freshman year at Amistad City High. In fact, they were all seriously at-risk for failure. During the 1995-1996 school year, these girls encountered life events that even the strongest of individuals would have trouble dealing with, and although the ways they coped with these events could not be interpreted as academic resilience, many of their behaviors could be interpreted as resilience in terms of survival. Their stories will be told in another format, for they are compelling, enlightening, and important.

This research has meant a great deal to me as an exploration of my self and has been a test of my own resilience. Many aspects of the girls’ lives mirror mine as a teenager, and have propelled me to think about my own ways of coping with stressful life events throughout my life. I discovered that I have much in common with Lupita, Mary, and Rachel regarding the ways they facilitate resilience in everyday living. In addition, many of the parental and teacher actions fostering resilience in the girls in this sample were also factors that have enabled me to retain academic competence throughout my life. At the end of this study, I feel I am closer to answering the question I posed in the introduction: What did I do to get here?

Although I have left the field, I have am not completely out of the girls’ lives. The friendships I have made with each girl, her family, and her teachers continue to grow as I continue to see them at church, high school football games, the grocery store, and as I call them periodically to keep in touch. I think this is important when one researches minors. I have made arrangements to meet with each of the girls over the Thanksgiving holidays for symbolic closure to the study, but also to thank them personally and to assure them that I will always be there for them if, and when, they need someone to talk to.
Letter of Agreement

I consent to allowing Veronica Lopez Estrada, a Ph.D. candidate at The Ohio State University, entrée to Amistad City High School for the purpose of conducting educational research.

I understand the purpose of her project is to gather the stories of three to five students who are academically successful despite having characteristics that are generally associated with being "at-risk" of school failure. As an administrator, I have been briefed on her research interests and know that her research project is a year long study that is qualitative in design.

I understand that her aims as a researcher are entirely ethical. She has ensured me that confidentiality will be enacted through changing names. In an effort to maintain the highest degree of confidentiality, the researcher will safeguard taped interviews and transcriptions. Further, when the study is completed, all tapes and transcriptions will be destroyed.

I understand that all the participants of her study will be informed about the researcher's purpose for conducting the study, what she is actually going to do during the process, and what she is going to do with the findings. I understand that the student-participants in the study will need written parental consent to be able to participate in this study and that the researcher will obtain written permission from their parents prior to data collection.

Finally, the researcher has assured me that she will not be disruptive during her scheduled visits, and she will inform her participants that they may stop participating at any time during the project. The researcher has offered to assist teachers who will allow her to gain access to their classrooms by tutoring their students during or outside of class time as a means of reciprocity.
Superintendent____________________, Date:____________________

Amistad City C.I.S.D.

Principal____________________, Date:____________________

Amistad City High School

Principal Researcher_______________, Date:____________________

The Ohio State University

Co-Researcher____________________, Date:____________________

The Ohio State University
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

I consent to participating in (or my child's participation in) research entitled:

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

or his/her authorized representative has (Principal Investigator)

explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and
the expected duration of my (my child's) participation. Possible
benefits of the study have been described as have alternative
procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional
information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised
have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that
I am (my child is) free to withdraw consent at any time and to
discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me (my
child).

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent
form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _____________________________ Signed: _____________________________

(Participant)

Signed: _____________________________ Signed: _____________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her Authorized Representative) (Person authorized to Consent
for participant- If required)

Witness: _____________________________

HS-027 (Rev. 3/87) -- (To be used only in connection with social and
behavioral research.)
CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN ESTUDIO DE COMPARTAMIENTO SOCIAL

Yo estoy de acuerdo en participar (o dar permiso a mi hijo) en la investigación titulada:

At Risk Students At Promise: Mexican American Youths Defying the Discourse of Deficiency

________________________________________ (Investigador Principal) o su representante

authorized a explicado el propósitos del estudio, los procedimientos a seguir, y el tiempo esperado de mi participación (o mi hijo) en el estudio. Posibles beneficios del estudio han sido descritos como procedimientos alternos, pero solo si estos procedimientos estaba disponibles.

Yo reconozco que he tenido la oportunidad de obtener información adicional sobre este estudio. Todas las preguntas y dudas que tuve han sido aclaradas. Entiendo que yo (o mi hijo) puedo terminar mi participación en el estudio de comportamiento social en cualquier momento.

Finalmente, doy a conocer que he leído y entiendo completamente este permiso. Firma voluntariamente. Una copia de este permiso se me ha otorgado.

Fecha:_________________________ Firmado:_____________________
(Participante)

Firmado:_______________________ Firmado:_____________________
(Investigador Principal o su Representante Autorizado) (Persona autorizada para dar permiso de participación- si es requerido)

Testigo:_______________________ HS-027 (translated to Spanish)

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To: Ninth Grade English & Language Arts Teachers

From: Dr. Maia Pank Mertz (PI) & Veronica Lopez Estrada (co-researcher)
The Ohio State University

Date: September 5, 1995

Subject: Research Participation

We are pleased that you are interested in joining our research project, "At-Risk Students At Promise: Mexican American Youths Defying the Discourse of Deficiency," as informants.

Attached is an informed consent form which outlines the project and what you can expect from us. We ask that you sign this and return it to us as soon as possible. Veronica will be at the research site on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so you can give it to her then. If it is more convenient to mail your consent form, we have also provided a self-addressed stamped envelope.

The study will entail the following:

1. In the autumn, Veronica will begin fieldwork by conducting participant observation in your classes. She will negotiate her role with your students as an advocate by assisting you in whatever capacity you choose as she gets to know your students. After spending extensive time in your classrooms, and really getting to know your students, Veronica will select a small sample of students that are appropriate candidates for the study (this will occur around late November or early December). Because ninth graders are minors, Veronica will ask for their parents' verbal and written permission to participate in the study. Veronica will also get the student participants' consent to be research participants as well (see attached informed consent forms). After this is accomplished, Veronica will conduct the first round of interviews with her student participants regarding their strategies for academic success and several other topics that emerge from the participant observation data. Teacher-informants will also be interviewed regarding their general impressions of their students, their idea of what it means to be "at-risk," learning strategies and patterns that they have noticed about their more successful students, and other topics that emerge from the researcher's observations.

2. In the winter months (January-March), Veronica will enter the second stage of the research. During this time, she will only observe
English/Language Arts/Reading classrooms where her sample participants are enrolled. Teacher-informants will be interviewed regarding the students' progress in their classes thus far and on other topics, patterns, and themes that emerge from the researcher's participant observations.

3. During the third stage of the research in the spring (April-June), teacher-informants will be interviewed for the last time regarding their students' progress overall. This final interview will most likely be a follow-up from the previous interview. Veronica will ask teacher-informants to look at a letter (or memo) that will summarize her findings at that point. The purpose here is to discuss any differences in interpretation— to make sure the researcher is as close to "right" as is humanly possible.

We are excited about this project, and hope the experience will be a meaningful one for you. While we hope you will join us in all three stages of the research, your participation in the first stage is particularly important. Of course, you can drop out at any time and we will respect this decision. Non-participation will have no effect on Veronica's offer to help tutor your students if they seek her outside of your class and make arrangements with her.

If you have any questions, please call Veronica at home or at work. You may leave messages if she is not in. We look forward to working with you.

If you are interested in participating in this project, please give or mail your consent forms to:

Veronica Lopez Estrada
XXX Street
Town, State 00000

cc: ______________, Superintendent
    ______________, Principal
Informed Consent Form  
(Teacher-Informants)

I consent to participating in the "At-Risk Students At Promise: Mexican American Youths Defying the Discourse of Deficiency" research project.

The purpose of the project is to gather stories of students who are academically successful despite having characteristics that are generally associated with being "at-risk" of school failure. As a participant, I understand that the research will involve the following: having the researcher come into my classes to conduct participant observation (this entails taking notes in some instances, and allowing her to participate in class activities on others), being interviewed on at least three separate occasions for thirty minute interviews during the 1995-1996 school year, filling out surveys/questionnaires on occasion, and meeting with the researcher once during the final stage of the research to go over the researcher's ongoing interpretations/analysis of the teacher-informant data.

In order to maintain confidentiality of the research project, I understand that my name and background information will be changed. I also understand that all tapes and transcriptions will be destroyed when the study is completed.

I understand that I can stop participating in this project at any time and that my participation or non-participation in the research will have no effect on my students' decisions to utilize the researcher's offer to provide free assistance in English class as reciprocity for having been allowed to conduct research at this school.

Name_____________________________ Title_____________________________

Years of Teaching Experience_____ Phone______________________________

Principle Investigator's Signature, _________________________________
The Ohio State University

Co-Researcher's Signature, _________________________________
The Ohio State University

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Student Assent Form  
(Case Study Research Participants)

I consent to participating in the "At-Risk Students At Promise: Mexican American Youths Defying the Discourse of Deficiency" research project.

The purpose of the project is to gather stories of students who are academically successful despite having characteristics that are generally associated with being "at-risk" of school failure. As a participant, I understand that the research will involve the following: having the researcher come into my classes and observe my learning behaviors and strategies, being interviewed on at least three separate occasions for 30-45 minutes at a time during the 1995-1996 school year, filling out surveys/questionnaires on occasion, and meeting with the researcher once during each stage of the research to go over the researcher's ongoing interpretations/analysis of the data. I understand that all interviews will be audio-taped.

To enact confidentiality, I understand that in any published documents, my name and the details of my life will be changed, and that tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the research.

I understand that I can stop participating in this project at any time and that my participation or non-participation in the research will have no effect on my decision to utilize the researcher's offer to provide free assistance in English class as reciprocity for having been allowed to conduct research at this school.

Name_____________________________ Address_____________________________

Phone____________________________

Principle Investigator's Signature, ________________________________.
The Ohio State University

Co-Researcher's Signature, ________________________________.
The Ohio State University
September 5, 1995

To the parents/guardians of: ____________________________

Hello. My name is Veronica Lopez Estrada. I am a researcher from The Ohio State University, and I am interested in learning about the learning strategies of Mexican American youths. I have gained access to your son's/daughter's English class, and I hope to learn as much as I can about the kinds of things that students do in order to experience school success. I believe that if we examine successful students, we may learn something about academic failure. Perhaps then, we can help prevent Mexican American teenagers from leaving school.

The purpose of this letter is to introduce myself and to inform you that I am making myself available to assist your child for English tutoring if he/she needs my help. This is my way of giving something back to the students from whom I am learning. Although I will not be in your son's/daughter's English classroom on an everyday basis, I will give them my home and office phone numbers, so that we can schedule tutoring times and dates.

Please know that my presence in your adolescent's class will not cause any disruption and that I am simply there to observe the strategies, themes, and patterns that occur with students who strive to succeed academically. Please understand that your child is not an actual case study participant at this time. After I spend extensive time in the classroom, I will be in a better position to select three to five participants for my study. At that time, I will need to request permission from the parents of my potential research participants. Therefore, at this point in the process, will you please sign this letter, so that I may document your knowledge of my presence in your child's classroom and my availability for tutorial instruction. Thank you. I appreciate your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,
Veronica Lopez Estrada
Co-Researcher

Prof. Maia Pank Mertz
Principal Investigator

Parent/Guardian Signature: ______________________________________
Para los padres de:________________________

Me llamo Verónica López Estrada. Yo soy una estudiante graduada que estudia para ser profesora de inglés de la Universidad de Ohio State en Columbus, Ohio. Estoy investigando las estrategias de aprendizaje de jóvenes de descendencia Mexicana en Borderlands High School. Espero aprender que es lo que hace que los jóvenes tengan o no tengan éxito, particularmente en la clase de inglés. Yo creo que si examinamos a estudiantes que tienen éxito en la escuela, aprenderemos algo de lo que causa a los jóvenes fracasar en sus estudios. Tal vez podemos prevenir que los jóvenes Mexicanos abandonen la escuela.

Mi intención en esta causa es informarle que voy a visitar la clase de inglés de su hijo/hija regularmente para aprender de ellos. Quiero a ofrecer mi instrucción de inglés a su hijo/hija si el o ella lo necesita. Es mi manera de devolver algo a los jóvenes. Aunque no puedo estar en la clase todos los días, si puedo dar mi número de teléfono en mi casa y trabajo y podemos arreglar un tiempo para estudiar.

Mi presencia en las clase de su hijo/hija no va causar ningún desorganización. Nadamas voy estar viendo las estratéjias, temas, y modelos que ocurren con estudiantes que tengan éxito.

En este momento, su hijo/hija no esta en un estudio de investigación. En tiempo, voy a escoger tres a cinco estudiantes para que participen en mi investigación. En ese tiempo, voy a pedir permiso de sus padres ante de participación.

Por favor firme su nombre para que signifique que saben de mi precencia en la clase de su hijo/hija, y tambien de mi oferta a dar instrucccion de inglés adicional si hay la necesidad.

Sinceramente,

Verónica López Estrada
Investigadora
Profesora Maia Pank Mertz
Investigadora Principal

Firmado:________________________
Student Questionnaire

1. What type of grades do you usually make in this class?
   all As  As & Bs  Bs & Cs  Cs & Ds  Ds & lower

2. What is your current GPA?
   1.0-2.0  2.0-3.0  3.0-3.5  3.0-3.5  3.5-4.0

3. List five people in this class who you think make the highest grades.

4. Are you one of these people?
   Yes  No

5. Are you involved in extracurricular activities? If so, list below.

6. Do you like to read? Provide one reason why you do or do not like to read.

7. Do you like to write? Provide one reason why you do or do not like to write.

8. Is education significant to you? Why or why not?
9. What are your plans after high school?

10. What kind of job or career do you want to pursue?

11. What is your favorite subject in school (excluding lunch or activity periods please)? Why?

12. What is your least favorite? Why?

13. Why do you think some students succeed in school despite their hardships and problems at home?

14. Why do you think others give up on school altogether?

15. To your knowledge, do successful students ever cheat in this class? If so, why do you think they do this?
16. Do you think the majority of successful students study hard for their classes?

17. Do you think you belong in this class? Why or why not?

18. Do you come from a single-parent household? Two-parent household? Other?

19. How much income do you estimate your parents/guardians make per year?

20. What ethnic category do you feel describes you best?

1. African American  
2. Anglo American  
3. Asian American  
4. Mexican American  
Other_________________

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire.

Mrs. Estrada

If you wish, you may choose to reveal your identity here.

Name: ________________________
Teacher Interview Guide  
First Interview

1. What do you like the most about teaching __________ level students?
2. How would you characterize the section I that I come to visit every week?
3. How would you define “at-risk”? Who are “at-risk” students?
4. Can you identify students in this class who are at risk of failing at this time?
5. Can you identify students in this class who are the high achievers at this time?

Teacher Interview Guide  
Second Interview

1. How would you characterize __________ as a student in your class since she first enrolled? In terms of behavior? Learning Strategies? Scores?
2. Where would you place __________ on a one to ten scale—one being most likely to fail and ten being most likely to pass with a very high average? Why?
3. Last time we talked about resilient students—those who succeed both personally and academically despite the odds that are stacked against them. Does __________ seem to exhibit resilience in your opinion? If so, in what way(s)?
4. What is your opinion regarding tracking students, or separating them in terms of ability group levels within the school system? Is this conducive for all students?
5. Do you believe teachers are tracked too? Why or why not?
Student Guided Interview Questions
First Interview

1. Tell me about yourself. Who is ______________?

2. What is your best personality trait? Your worst? What aspects about yourself do you want to improve on?

3. Describe a typical school day for me.


5. What are your plans after high school?

6. Who are your best friends? Describe them and tell why they are your best friends.

7. Describe yourself at school. What are you like there? Now at home. And with your friends.

8. How do you usually cope with problems? Give me an example of a problem you recently had to cope with and tell how you dealt with it.

9. Do you have a significant other? Tell me about him/her. Describe your relationship with this person. Does he/she make you feel powerful or powerless?

10. Describe your study habits.
Student Guided Interview Questions
Second Interview

1. What is your family makeup? Name the members of your immediate family and their ages.

2. Who do you usually go to for emotional support? Why?

3. Have there been any stressful events in your life thus far? Can you describe major changes in your life that may have caused you emotional strain or stress?

4. How have these stressful life events affected your school life? your personal life? your family life?

5. Would you consider your family life stable? Why or why not?

6. What were your grades like in elementary, junior high, and now? How has your attitude toward school changed or remained the same?

7. How would you describe your feelings toward your parents?

8. Do you have a philosophy in life? An attitude you live by?


10. How do you feel about the area where you live? The school you attend? The family and friends that you have? Do you feel generally positive about life or negative? Why?
Student Guided Interview Questions  
Third Interview

1. Do you consider your parents to be supportive parents? Are they nurturing and competent? Do they attempt to make your life stress-free?

2. Do you like who you are as a person?

3. Can you solve problems easily? Do you generally have difficulty solving problems?

4. Do you believe you are generally in control of your life?

5. Would you describe yourself as a confident person? Why or why not?

6. Do you look for environments and people that you think will be good for you?

7. What are your personal strengths? Any skills?

8. Do you behave according to your beliefs?

9. Do you believe in God or another spiritual being? How does God fit in your life?

10. Do you look forward to your future? Why?

11. How do you deal with challenges? Do you look for opportunities to be challenged?

12. Do you ever detach yourself from people in your life that you feel are negative, will distract you, or will cause you stress or emotional pain? How?
Parents Guided Interview Questions
First Interview

1. What was your/your wife's pregnancy like with _________________.

2. What was ___________ like as a baby? a small child?

3. What was ___________ home atmosphere like as an infant, a child, and now?

4. Were there any shifts in socioeconomic status throughout your daughter's lifetime due to either better paying jobs or unemployment?

5. Who did ___________ go to for emotional support when she was a child? And now? Why?

6. Can you identify any potentially stressful life events that your daughter has gone through in her lifetime such as a marital separation/divorce, moving to another city or town, loss of a loved one, etc.? How did she cope with this (these) events?

7. Can you recall ___________'s test scores or general school performance during her early childhood and through adolescence? What kind of student was your daughter in kindergarten, third grade, sixth grade, and now? If there were stress events at any time, were her grades effected? How?

8. Describe the kind of relationship you have with your daughter. Would you say it is a good one? Would you like it to be closer and stronger?

9. What would you say is the thing you are most proud of when it comes your daughter?

10. What issues are you most concerned about regarding your daughter? Why?
Parent Guided Interview Questions
Second Interview

1. How many years of education did you accomplish?

2. Did you place restrictions on your daughter's television viewing as a child? an adolescent? Why or Why not?

3. Does your daughter have chores or responsibilities at home? Describe them. At what age did she assume these responsibilities?

4. As a parent, have you ever monitored your daughter's homework? (i.e., made sure she has completed it).

5. How do you feel about your daughter's participation in school clubs and organizations? Do you encourage her or discourage her to join these organizations and groups?

6. Are you considerate of her course load, extracurricular activities, and social life? Do you ever try to make it easier for her at home so she can manage and concentrate on school? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
A List of Things to Assist in the Validation of Naturalistic Generalization

1. Include accounts of matters the readers are already familiar with so they can gauge the accuracy, completeness, and bias of reports with other matters.

2. Provide adequate raw data prior to interpretation so that the readers can consider their own alternative interpretations.

3. Describe the methods of case research used in ordinary language including how the triangulation was carried out, especially the confirmation and efforts to disconfirm major assertions.

4. Make available, both directly and indirectly, information about the researcher and other sources of input.

5. Provide the reader with reactions to the accounts from data sources and other prospective readers, especially those expected to make use of the study.

6. De-emphasize the idea that validity is based on what every observer sees, on simple replication; emphasize whether or not the reported happenings could have or could not have been seen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I want to know?</th>
<th>Why do I need to know it?</th>
<th>What kind of data will answer the questions</th>
<th>Where can I find it?</th>
<th>Whom do I contact for access?</th>
<th>Time Lines for acquisition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What role does school play in the lives of the students in this sample?</td>
<td>To assess the relationship between their attitudes about education and academic achievement.</td>
<td>Informal and guided interviews; student questionnaires; participant observation.</td>
<td>Classrooms, homes, extracurricular activities &amp; events.</td>
<td>Superintendent, principal, teachers, parents, students.</td>
<td>Aug. 1995-obtain permission to conduct study from administrators and entree from teachers; parent and students' consent before Christmas holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do the students in this sample view themselves and their place in the world?</td>
<td>To discover how these students perceive themselves and the quality of their lives in the community(s) where they live.</td>
<td>Informal and guided interviews; participant observation.</td>
<td>Classrooms, homes, extracurricular activities &amp; events.</td>
<td>Students will be asked to sign an assent form and will be interviewed formally three times during spring semester of 1996.</td>
<td>1st interviews- Feb. 1996; 2nd interviews- Mar./April 1996; 3rd interviews- May/June 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent are these students' self-concepts related to school success?</td>
<td>To assess the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement.</td>
<td>Informal and guided interviews; participant observation.</td>
<td>Classrooms, homes, extracurricular activities &amp; events.</td>
<td>Students will be interviewed and participant observation will continue one hour per week per student during English classes.</td>
<td>Participant-observation begins in late Aug. 1995 and ends in late May 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent are these students' self-concepts shaped by their social statuses at school, identities at home, and relations with peers?</td>
<td>To assess the affects ability group labeling, home, and peer identity constructions have on these students and to discover the extent to which managing multiple subject positions relates to self-concept and academic achievement.</td>
<td>Informal and guided interviews; participant observation.</td>
<td>Classrooms, homes, extracurricular activities &amp; events.</td>
<td>Same as above. In addition, I will schedule teacher &amp; parent interviews.</td>
<td>Teacher interviews- Oct. 1995 and Feb. 1996. Parent interviews- Feb. 1996 and May 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do I want to know?</td>
<td>Why do I need to know it?</td>
<td>What kind of data will answer these questions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do the resilient students in this sample cope with adverse life events and conditions that enable them to retain academic competence?</td>
<td>To discover coping strategies these students have developed that play into their schooling; particularly during stressful events that have occurred in their past. To determine what their current level of achievement is as compared with their peers.</td>
<td>Informal and guided interviews; participant-observation.</td>
<td>Classrooms, home interviews.</td>
<td>Students, parents, and teachers will be asked to be interviewed regarding this topic.</td>
<td>Same interview time frame as previous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the academic achievement of the students in this study?</td>
<td>To determine if students have maintained strong histories of academic achievement throughout their schooling; particularly during stressful life events. To determine what their current level of achievement is as compared with their peers.</td>
<td>Documents such as norm and criterion referenced test scores, report cards, and class assignments.</td>
<td>Registrar's office, students, and teachers.</td>
<td>School registrar, teachers, and students.</td>
<td>Collect copies of students' school records from the registrar after the first six weeks testing period of 1996-1997 school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do students in this sample plan to do after high school?</td>
<td>To assess the degree to which career planning affects academic achievement.</td>
<td>Informal and guided interviews.</td>
<td>Meetings with individual students.</td>
<td>Students.</td>
<td>During one of the interviews conducted in Spring semester of 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do teachers think about these students' capabilities?</td>
<td>To assess teacher expectations of these students.</td>
<td>Informal and guided interviews.</td>
<td>Meetings with individual teachers.</td>
<td>Teachers.</td>
<td>During interviews or participant-observation conducted in 1995-1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the academic expectations of the students' parents in this study?</td>
<td>To assess parent expectations of their daughters' academic level of achievement, and to discover the degree to which home cultural values affect academic achievement.</td>
<td>Guided interviews.</td>
<td>Meetings with individual parents.</td>
<td>Parents.</td>
<td>First interviews—Feb. 1996.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF REFERENCES


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Notes

1. Like Manning and Baruth (1995), I believe:

   1. All children and adolescents are at-risk at some time.
   2. At-risk conditions affect children and adolescents in different ways and might not affect some children and adolescents at all.
   3. Educators must use great caution when determining who is and who is not at-risk. (p. 7)

I am critical of the prevalent use of the label "at-risk" because it is used so loosely; it is associated with poor children of color; it is a label that segregates poor children from children of higher socioeconomic status; and it is a label based on a deficiency model of learning. However, I am not arguing against the facts. There are, indeed, children who are in danger of not completing school or completing school without the necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills to function effectively in adult life who do fit the aforementioned descriptions.

2. In all fairness, these cooperating teachers were never asked if they thought their teaching was part of the problem.

3. I borrowed the concept and term "nested case studies" from Virginia Richardson, Ursula Casanova, Peggy Placier and Karen Guilfoyle in their collaborative study School Children At-Risk (1989).


5. I conducted interviews with Mrs. Garza in Spanish and translated them to English in transcripts. Mrs. Garza is originally from Mexico and understands very little English, yet she has been a successful business woman in South Texas for over 15 years.

6. It is important to note Mrs. C's level of expectations for her Honors and GT groups were exactly the same. It was not uncommon for her to plan class
assignments (and homework) which included the same process concepts, or learning objectives, for both class sections. I noticed her composition assignments were sometimes identical in each class, although GT students had shorter deadlines than Honors students. Likewise, while she covered similar genres of literature simultaneously for each class, the differences were in her selection of texts. In short, Mrs. Chavana considered the degree of familiarity her Honors and GT students had with particular types of assignments and tailored her classes to account for those differences.

7. U.I.L. is an acronym for University Interscholastic League. In Valley schools, when people say, "She's in UIL," this means she competes in either one or more writing, speaking, mathematics, science, and drama events with students from other schools. Honors and GT students represent most of the students that are encouraged join UIL. Students practice their events afterschool with sponsors every week and compete in weekly practice tournaments with other students from schools all over Texas in preparation for their district competitions. Someone who places 1st, 2nd, or 3rd at the district meet qualifies to compete at the Regional level. Likewise, one who places 1st, 2nd, or 3rd at the Regional competition qualifies at the State level, where they have the opportunity to compete with the best students in the State for a gold, silver, or bronze medal.

8. My New Year's Resolution was to begin writing the dissertation and complete the project before New Year's 1998. This is one resolution I may actually keep.

9. According to Bonnie Bernard (1991) resiliency research consistently describes resilient children and adolescents as having the following attributes: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose. These are consistent with the list of themes found in this study and listed in Table 8.1.


11. Recently, this view was expressed by a law professor at The University of Texas at Austin who stated, "blacks and Mexican Americans can't compete academically with whites" and come from cultures where "failure is not looked upon with disgrace." These racially charged comments have captured national attention.
12. The girls in this study came from households where the total household income was $25,000 a year or lower. It is important to note that in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, middle-class status for the average family of four is designated to households where the median household income is $18,501-$27,000. Households where income is below $18,500 per year is considered lower class and incomes above $27,000 is considered upper class SES status. The state median household income is $27,016. These are 1990 U.S. Census statistics obtained from the Texas Comptroller's Office.

13. Member checks were conducted throughout the writing process to ensure trustworthiness. The girls, parents, and teachers were called upon quite often during the writing up of these chapters to rule out the possibility of misinterpretation of what they say and the perspective they have on what went on during data-collection. J.A. Maxwell (1996) contends that 'it is important not to assume that the participants' pronouncements are necessarily valid; their responses should be taken simply as evidence regarding the validity of your account' (p. 94).