

## Two Latina Teachers Culture, Success, Higher Education

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### Abstract

This phenomenological case study focuses on an examination of Latina immigrants' perspectives on their graduate-level teacher education experiences and their motivation to succeed in higher education. Two core theories; critical consciousness and resilience and seven domains; social class, immigrant status, gender, ethnicity, education, religion/spirituality, and political issues emerged from semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Critical consciousness and resiliency developed in response to childhood poverty, sexism, and racism, and may be the foundation of their commitment to higher education.

### Introduction

When the two Latina immigrants participating in this study began their graduate work at a southern comprehensive university's college of education they were in for a surprise: the less-than-enthusiastic attitudes of their American classmates toward graduate school and their jobs as teachers. These Latinas, who took advantage of every available educational opportunity, questioned why their classmates had such negative attitudes toward education. The authors noted the dichotomy between the attitudes of the two Latina immigrants and their American classmates. Also noted was how the attitudes of the two Latinas contradicted pervasive stereotypes concerning Latinos and education. Recognizing that these Peruvian women viewed education very differently than many of the American students in our classes, we sought to understand their attitudes about education through an examination of their lives and experiences.

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Research on Latinos and education typically focuses on their lack of success compared to Euro-American students or on how to improve the success rates of “at-risk” Latino students (Gándara, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Marietta, 2010). The authors undertook this study to better understand why these women were so very positive and enthusiastic about education and their teaching careers. Thus, the authors of this study look at successful immigrant Latina graduate students and examine their perspectives on their higher education experiences in the United States, as well as the life experiences and related attitudes that shape these perspectives. These perspectives are contrasted to the pervasive stereotypes that Latinos do not value education as do Euro-Americans.

Part of our motivation to do this research was to contribute to debunking the myths that support a negative attitude toward Latino students and parents in schools. Our more than thirty years of experience working with Latino populations in the United States and overseas, as well as teaching teachers, informed us that public and teacher attitudes toward Latino people, especially Latino immigrants, was typically based on limited interaction. That attitude, as expressed in our classes and in local school systems, can be summarized as ‘Latino immigrants are lazy, poorly educated, don’t want to learn English, a challenge to teach... a problem.’

### Literature Review and Background

Years of informal discussions with teacher education graduate students and practicing classroom teachers indicate to the authors that American teachers have mixed attitudes towards teacher education and graduate teacher education programs. The “buzz” among our graduate students has been that graduate classes are too much work for teachers who are working full time, have families and other obligations and for whom getting an advanced certificate is the only route to a salary raise. In class journals and course evaluations our graduate students often complained about the amount of work assigned and the level of reading and writing required in graduate courses. Teachers in the field advise our preservice teachers that they will not learn how to be a teacher in preservice college classes; the “real” learning will be in student teaching and in on-the-job experience. Undergraduate field experience course end-of-year focus groups conducted by the authors (1996-2005) also revealed K-12 classroom teachers’s informal suggestion that college teacher training classes are of limited value. This pervasive negative attitude toward higher education is what our study participants found strikingly common among their American classmates.

One of the participants in this study often declared:

Why are these American teachers always complaining about their graduate classes?  
They’re easy! They don’t know how good they have things here. They don’t know how lucky they are. They’re lazy.

The American public, including many American teachers, hold negative and stereotyped perspectives shaped by the media about Latinos, including recent immigrant students and their academic abilities (Reyes, 2003, Chavez, 2013). Numerous studies document this phenomenon. Chavez (2013) reported what many perceive as “the Latino Threat”: a set of commonly held negative misconceptions about Latino immigrants and citizens that have translated into harsh anti-immigration laws. Misconceptions include Latinos refusing to learn English and integrate in American culture. Reyes (2003) found that teachers have negative conceptions of Latinos which included the lack of discipline, the lack of commitment to learning, and the ability to keep others from learning. Valencia and Black (2002) extensively documented (and then debunked) the myth that Mexican Americans devalue education, exploring the various historical iterations of deficit theory which lead to low academic expectations for Latino students. Ference and Bell (2002) and Gonzalez and Ayala-Alcantar (2008) reported that their preservice teacher education students held negative attitudes about Latinos including that “students and families with Spanish accents are inferior,” that Latino parents do not want their children to learn English (Gonzalez & Ayala-Alcantar, pg. 7), and that Latino students “learn poorly or not at all in schools” (Ference & Bell, pg. 6). In a comparison of teacher perceptions of Latino and European American academic competence, Edl, Jones, and Estell (2008) found that teachers rated Latino students in bilingual classrooms as less academically competent than their European American peers. Sox (2009), in a synthesis of research on immigrants and ELLs in the South, found that Latino immigrants were unwelcome and unwanted in schools, and discriminated against by school personnel. The Latino Coalition of Hillsboro County (2000) found that high Latino drop-out rates were influenced by (among other things) poor teacher-student relationships and cultural barriers. Plata, Masten, and Trusty (1999) ascertained that Anglo teachers viewed Anglo students as superior to Latino students. Research on Latinos and education typically focuses on deficit models, often on how to improve the success rate of “at-risk” Latino students; however, there is significant research that contradicts these negative stereotypes and assumptions.

Contradicting negative perceptions and stereotypes is research that demonstrates success among Latino immigrant students (Ceballo, 2004; Escamilla, Chavez, & Vigil, 2005; Fuligni, 2001; Gonzalez & Ayala-Alcantar, 2008); Orellana, Ek, & Hernandez, 2000; Savitt, 1984; Tinkler, 2002; Valencia & Black, 2002). Tinkler (2002) discovered that Latino culture has high respect for teachers and education. Ceballo (2004) found that Latino parents provide significant support for their children’s education. Orellana, Ek, and Hernandez (2000) found that Latino parents want their children to speak English. Escamilla, Chavez, and Vigil (2005) found that Latino immigrant students performed close to the achievement levels of English speaking American students. Valencia and Black found significant evidence that Latinos value education, including their struggle for educational equity in the U.S. and transgenerational evidence of parent involvement. Savitt (1984) reported that

over a ten-year period her Latina students “continue their successes, often outstripping the Hispanic male in what may be called energy and ambition” (p.1). Her Latina students were also “women who juggle full-time work, full-time families and full-time studies” but are “unwilling to undermine their familial relationships and will not compromise on their educational or personal goals” (p. 1). Savitt found that the persistence of her students in their educational goals, saying “school is a socially and morally respectable outlet for Hispanic girls” (p. 1). Since Latina women have fewer culturally acceptable options than males, they are more focused on their educational goals. “In fact, the tight controls over her social behavior have propelled her to achievement in very socially acceptable arenas” (Savitt 1984, p. 1). Resilience can also be a significant factor in the success of marginalized groups, including women, cultural minorities, people living in poverty, and immigrants (Arellano, Padilla, 1996; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 2000; Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). Resilient individuals from marginalized populations are more likely to succeed in formal education than their non-resilient counterparts (Werner & Smith, 1992, 2001; Madera, 2009).

Resiliency Theory explains in part how members of marginalized or oppressed groups succeed in life despite their social position. It discusses three major variables:

risk factors, which are stressful situations and chronic adversity that hinder children’s successful development; protective factors, which are variables such as family support, a relationship with community or mentors and a strong sense of self that outweigh risk factors; and resiliency, the attributes of which are social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose. (Gonzales, 2003, p. 4)

Yosso (2005) reported that Latinas develop resiliency in the form of skills to “maneuver through social institutions... not created with Communities of Color in mind” (p. 80), abilities to resist subordination “through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (p. 81), and attitudes and dispositions that allow aspirations of hope for the future in the face of oppression (p. 79).

### ***Definition of Terms***

*Critical Consciousness*, as defined by Freire, is an awareness and deep understanding of the social and political contradictions in the world that characterize the oppression of disenfranchised groups of people, especially the poor, and particularly as they apply to oneself. Praxis, the reflexive process of conscientization (becoming critically conscious) is to think, to reflect, and to act. Critical consciousness positions the oppressed to take action against that which oppresses them (Freire, 1972, 1998, 2005).

*Machismo*, an aspect of *masculine hegemony* (Gutmann, 2002) has varying definitions depending on the social class, gender, education level, race and membership in subordinate or dominant social groups of the definer (Soong, 1999,

Gutmann, 2002). The traditional definition from the *Dictionary of Mexican Cultural Code Words* (De Mente, 1996) is summarized as “a sexist patriarchy with a standard repertoire of churlish behaviors (.e.g. public drunkenness, violence, debauchery and wife beating)” (Soong, 1999). Higher social class Latino males define machismo as when a man “supports and protects his family in the face of all odds, who disciplines his children to be upright, honest and hardworking,” while lower classes define machismo more negatively (Soong, 1999). Latinas are more likely to view themselves as having roles outside the home and less subjugated to males than males view women (Soong, 1999), though the roles of Latino men and their views of masculinity and machismo are changing in recent years (Gutmann, 2002). The two Latina women in this study used the term machismo in the former, traditional and more negative perspective.

*Quechua* refers to an indigenous group of the Andean region, including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru and the language spoken by this indigenous group. Quechua was the official language of the *Tawantinsuyu*, the Incan Empire at the time of the Spanish invasion in the 1530's (Heggarty, 2006).

The *Shining Path* (*Sendero Luminoso [SL]*) calls itself The Communist Party of Peru (*el Partido Comunista del Perú [PCP]*), a Maoist communist movement, and views itself as leader of the world's “pure” communist movement (The Communist Party of Perú, 1998). The Peruvian and United States governments define it as an insurgent left-wing terrorist organization (U. S. Department of State, 2004; U.S. Department of State, 2006). According to Lauer (2009), although the organization was focused on ideological agendas in the 1980s, it evolved to where 50% of its activities became narco-trafficking in the 2000's.

*Latinas vs. Latinos vs. Latin American Immigrants*: For the purposes of this study, Latin American Immigrants are defined as a subgroup of Latinos; the study focuses on two Latinas who are recent immigrants from Peru, South America; however, there are gender issues in the data so both sexes are included in the discussion, thus the use of “Latinos.”

## Method

The authors combine Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1967, 1998) and phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994) in a qualitative case study approach to explore the perspectives of two Peruvian Latinas concerning their success in higher education. Simply put, phenomenology illuminates a phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it. Using data from separate interviews with two Latina immigrant women, as well as informal discussions, class discussions, and participant produced documents, we compare and describe the experiences that are the foundation of their motivation for success and challenge normative assumptions found in American education concerning Latino attitudes toward education. Semi-structured in-depth interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were conducted in a

conversational framework, recorded and reviewed, then coded. The participants had no access to each other's responses. Although the researchers are fluent in Spanish, *at the request of the participants* the interviews were conducted in English. Spanish was used for clarification in instances when the participants did not know the English vocabulary necessary to accurately explain their experiences or when there was no literal translation for a concept (as in the term "Chola").

An interview question set was initially developed addressing their personal background, school experiences in Peru and in the U.S. (particularly the graduate program in which we were teaching), general attitudes toward education, their motivation to excel, and their perceptions of their American classmates and co-worker teachers. The data from the initial semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, written reflections (from class assignments), and class discussions were then coded and compared to identify emerging theory. Emergent domains (categories, themes) were used to formulate follow-up clarification questions. These questions addressed the participants' attitudes toward higher education, the development of educational attitudes and perceptions, and the reasons for their success in higher education including more specific comparisons between higher education experiences in Peru and in the U.S., specifics on the barriers to academic success they faced (particularly the language barrier as they were ELLs), and their attitudes towards teacher education. Follow-up questions were asked when necessary to clarify and amplify points and to search for additional domains (categories, themes). Interviews were coded and emergent categories/domains/themes compared to those from the previously collected and coded data and to search for evidence which could disconfirm the emerging theory.

### *Participants*

The focus of this case study is on two participants, both Latina immigrants. The selection of these participants was serendipitous as the phenomenon we sought to explore was brought to our attention through encounters with these individuals. We assigned pseudonyms (Marita and Justinia) to protect their privacy. We have also changed some personal descriptive information to insure their anonymity. The participants were both graduate students in teacher education programs at a southern regional university at the time of the study. Both have attended education courses offered by the authors. It is important to note that even though the two participants were in the same teacher education program they were never in the same class, nor did they know one another. Both participants are mothers and teach Spanish in local schools, one full time at a private religious-based school and the other part time at three different public elementary schools. The participants inspired this investigation because of their outstanding performances in the graduate classes and the perceptive questions they would pose concerning attitudes of fellow American graduate students. The participants were classified as outstanding because they read required materials, were prepared for class discussion, would submit assignments ahead of time with double the required work, excel on class projects leaving class-

mates in awe and then inquire what else they could do to supplement and improve their learning and performance. After class, the participants would approach the researchers with questions regarding the lack of preparation, work ethic, and class engagement of their classmates.

### Findings

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and new ways of integrating information that the researchers uncover beyond their initial concepts and frameworks. This research was indeed serendipitous from its initial conception to its findings.

Two core theories, critical consciousness and Resilience Theory and seven domains (categories) emerged from the data. We report the data in the emergent categories (Glaser, 1967) or domains (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of social class, immigrant status, gender, ethnicity, education, religion/spirituality, and political issues and follow with an analysis of the domains (categories) in terms of the core emergent theories.

Results are reported in the voices of the participants with corrections only for grammatical errors which would impede meaning. Information in the participants' voices is in quotation marks. Information summarized for brevity and not in the participants' voices is not in quotation marks. Categories are often interrelated and issues overlap, as do Gender and Education or Religion and Ethnicity.

#### *Social Class*

Participants expressed that social class factors such as class roles and overwhelming poverty motivated them to work hard to their lives and the lives of others.

Marita: "I grew up in a traditional professional, middle class Latino family where the boys were expected to go onto college and have a career and the girls stay home and take care of the family. Coming from a country where poverty is everywhere makes you want to do something about it. I could have ignored the poverty but could not have lived with myself if I did."

Justinia: "I grew up in poverty. Look at me in this picture: when I was five years old, my mother dressed me in donated clothes. My shoes were several sizes too big and I had no socks. I carry this picture with me to remind myself what life once was like."

#### *Immigration Status*

Participants did not have the security of citizenship. There was always a fear that all one has worked for could be taken away at any moment. Working hard and doing one's best might avoid the possibility of deportation back to Peru. This was more of an issue for Marita than Justinia as long as Justinia remained married.

Marita: "I immigrated six years ago when my estranged husband threatened

me with two choices: come to the United States or never see my daughter again. I work hard to make opportunities for my two children. I am here on a student visa. I am trying to get residency so I can get a green card and a regular job, but I need a job to get residency. My husband and daughter are residents.”

Justinia: “I am a resident and my husband is a U.S. citizen that I met in Central America. I came to the United States five years ago on a fiancé visa. I was previously married to a German man and have a son with him. I am glad that I live in the U.S. I do go to Ecuador frequently on mission trips.”

### *Gender*

Gender roles are quite specific in the participants’ culture and country of origin. The possibility for women to go on to higher education and professional careers is limited.

Marita: “I resent Catholicism. The Catholic religion favors men. Women have to work harder and have fewer opportunities. They have very specific gender roles that are subordinate to men. Both the Spanish and the Catholicism are responsible for the gender discrimination in my culture.” Marita credits strong women role models in her life for her motivations. “I admired the strength of my Inca grandmother who cooked everyday for 70 years without ever having educational opportunities beyond the kitchen.”

Justinia: “Girls are mentally prepared to be housewives. Boys have a different future. Men are expected to be providers. They can be doctors, but then kill themselves to get ahead. Doctors earn \$15 for treating a patient.”

### *Ethnicity (Latino and Quechua)*

Though participants referred to themselves as Latina, they placed great importance in their indigenous Quechua heritage that provided them strength and guidance to persevere through difficult situations.

Marita has strong Inca beliefs learned from her mother’s side. “I consider myself a “Chola,” a white woman in an Indian body. I am both Quechua and Latina, but I identify more strongly with Quechua values. There is a spiritual [spirit world/dark] energy that comes from my Inca heritage. This energy makes me perceive things, and “feel” the environment around me. It makes me understand people, students, even when they are not like me (e.g. social class). “Although males think our culture is patriarchal, it is really matriarchal because we women control the homes and children.”

Justinia: Culturally Latina, Justinia identifies strongly with her Quechua heritage. “In school I was looked down upon and teased for being Inca. Now I define myself as a “proud Chola.” My Inca heritage is the source of my inner strength and my resiliency. One of my professors told me I am resilient. Quechua people do not give up. My father, cousins, and sisters are all like that and devoted to their work. Quechua like my parents are honest, noble, and modest. It was important to be law

abiding. There are no insult words in Quechua. Since my parents spoke Quechua at home, there were seldom any insults said to others or family members. Wealth is a private issue. Quechua people do not flaunt their wealth. My father, who has become a wealthy businessman, told our family, "Wealth is between God and us." When one is fortunate one must give back to the community. My father was my example in this value. He anonymously built a school in the Andes and created a scholarship for women to study music."

### *Education*

Both participants valued the opportunities that a formal education could provide them. Higher education is more accessible in the United States than in Peru, especially for women, and the participants felt they needed to take advantage of every educational opportunity. It was also important to do well in school out of respect for the family.

Marita: "My attitude toward education is to take advantage of all the opportunities that are presented and do my best. Education will provide opportunities. I am a perfectionist and competitive. I need to be perfect to honor my family. My parents sent me to a good private school when I was young. Then I was expected to marry. I did but I was bored and wanted to go to university like my brothers. My father and brothers asked me what I wanted to study. I said "law." They said "No! That is for men!" So I chose geography and they said "No!" Then I suggested education. Finally they allowed me to go to university to study elementary education. That was what they thought suitable for women."

Justinia: Education in Peru is "primitive." My father worked hard to get an education and then gave education to his children. He came from the mountains and went to one of the best universities. I went to public and private schools. My classmates made fun of me and called me "Chola" because of my dark skin and hair. In a class of forty-seven students I was the only one to apply to college and be accepted. I studied business.

### *Religion/Spirituality*

Both participants were brought up in the Catholic Church but their strength and resiliency was derived from their Inca spirituality.

Marita: "I think the Spanish could have given instead of just take from the Incas. I am very spiritual. I was raised in the Catholic Church, but I believe my spirituality derives from my Inca ancestors. I see the spirit world around myself and others. My Inca grandmother told me I should fear the living not the spirits of the dead."

Justinia: "I am very devout. Jesus is the center of my life. I devote my days to Jesus. I was raised with Catholic values but embedded with Inca spirituality. I see myself as part of the Inca spirit that I was raised with."

*Political Issues*

The participants experienced the atrocities of political unrest in their country. Surviving these political conflicts, they were able to view their lives with a purpose to “give back” through education and mission trips to countries where others are less fortunate.

Marita: “Jobs are political...many times this means sleeping with men in power if you want to get a job or promotion. Even to this day, my husband suspects that I must be sleeping with the University administration because I do so well in school and that I plan to graduate soon. While attending university in Peru, I was exposed to the politics of social class and ethnic differences. Socialists and particularly members of the Shining Path would be at the university recruiting students to their way of thinking. It was easy since working class people had so little and they promised a share of the wealth and power.”

Justina: “I was in my senior year of college when an attempt was made to kidnap my brother. My family had to move overnight to Central America. We left with just our clothes. We could take nothing with us. Later I tried to return incognito but couldn’t finish my degree. Too much time had passed, I had missed too much work and it was too dangerous. Terrorists do well because there is little chance to get ahead in Peru. During that time incognito I could not live the middle class lifestyle I had become accustomed to. I saw a different side of Peru. I saw the poverty and came to understand the difficulties lower class people endured in their daily lives. One day after spending much time preparing myself, my hair, clothes and make-up to go to the university I was waiting for the bus that goes to the university. Along came an expensive car—the type of car, which used to drive me to school. I was splashed by the car. My hair, makeup and clothes got wet and dirty. At that moment I realized that I had been very fortunate and needed to give back to—help those less fortunate society. I was able to finish my business degree in the United States in 1999.”

### Limitations of Study

Qualitative methods assume that, unlike quantitative research, findings are not for the purpose of generalization, but rather to understand the case under study, be it a phenomenon, an aspect of a culture, or a situation. The authors sought to understand the phenomenon of the participants’ positive attitude toward higher education (particularly toward the demanding work load, the level and quantity of reading, and so on) through their perspective, their life stories, and their experiences. Thus, the authors do not intend to imply the information gathered in this research, or the conclusions drawn are representative of all members of the cultural sub-groups to which the participants are members (Quechua, Latinas, Peruvians, immigrants), nor generalizable beyond those subgroups.

Qualitative research does not pretend to avoid bias. Qualitative researchers are “involved” in their research, and their experiences inform their research. Hence,

aspects of authors' the backgrounds that inform this study need to be mentioned. The authors have worked with Latino populations since 1977, have lived and worked in five Latin American countries, and worked with Latino immigrant populations in the U.S. since 1984. These experiences influenced the choice to study this topic, and informed both their research approach and interpretation of the data.

The research was also informed by the authors' twenty years of experience in higher education: the negative and complaining attitudes of American graduate students towards graduate course demands observed by the participants, were also observed by the authors. The dichotomy of attitudes between the American graduate students and the study participants triggered the decision to study this phenomenon from the perspective of the two Peruvian students. Although the study could have been expanded to explore the motivation for the negative attitudes of the American students (non-Latino, non-immigrant), that was not the purpose of this study. The authors document that these attitudes exist as background for the study and to contrast these to the attitudes of the participants.

### Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

The reasons behind the participants' attitudes toward higher education were complex and multi-layered. Central to participant's attitudes were their ethnic/linguistic heritage, religion, social class, immigrant status, gender, previous education and political experiences. Participants in this study provided examples that contradict American teacher stereotypes of Latino students. Similar to the Latinas interviewed by Walker, MacGillvray, and Aguitar (2001), Marita and Justinia perceived higher education as critical to their success.

We originally sought to investigate why two Latina graduate students had such different attitudes toward higher education than their American graduate teacher education student counterparts. We found some insights into this phenomenon after identifying and examining the domains (categories) of social class, immigrant status, gender, ethnicity, education, religion/spirituality, and political issues. Through the coded and sorted notes on informal discussions, class discussions, written participant-produced reflections on Critical Theory and Freire's (1972, 2005) work, and the oral histories of the participants, two core theories (critical consciousness and Resilience Theory) emerged from the research as central themes.

Similar to Madera (2009) we conclude that resilience is central to the success of Latina women in education. Justinia and Marita faced many obstacles in their early lives including poverty, sexism, and racism. They were later confronted with problematic marriages that included mental abuse, personal endangerment due to political and economic instability, and forced relocation. The Support they received from their families outweighed the barriers they encountered. Marita had strong support from her grandmother and teachers, while Justinia's support came primarily from both her parents, especially her father. This support from immediate

family members has been documented by Gándara (1982) as an important factor in success in higher education. Justinia also received encouragement from several professors which according to Singh and Stoloff (2003) can be a crucial support in overcoming barriers in higher education.

Selden and Wasylenko (1995) and Heyman, Brush, Provasnik, Fanning, Lent, and DeWilde, (2002) found that fewer females and poor children were enrolled in elementary schools in Peru than boys and other economic groups. According to Marita, “In Peru, women are expected to get married, have children and take care of the house.” Gender discrimination was a primary force behind Marita’s motivation to pursue graduate school education; however, Justinia did not experience nearly the same level of gender discrimination. Her father expected all of his children to earn a university degree. Justinia did not state that she was expected to marry. She implied that this was her expectation as a Latina and for religious reasons, women in other patriarchal societies have experiences similar to Marita’s. Tett (2000) found that working class women were discouraged from pursuing a higher education by the men in their families.

Castellanos (1996) found that identifying with one’s cultural and ethnic background played an important part in the success of Latina graduate students. According to Silverblatt (1987), in Incan society women have traditionally held positions nearly equal to those of men, both in politics and religion. Women and men form a dualistic social system where male and female elements interact in social, religious and reproductive situations. Both Justinia and Marita trace their strength of character, persistence in the face of barriers, and resiliency to their Inca heritage. Like the Peruvian Inca girl ‘Senna’ whose story of resilience is told in the documentary, *Girl Rising* (Robbins, 2013), Marita and Justina were motivated to succeed in response to a culture which told them they could not. Although both Justinia and Marita identify strongly with their Incan heritage, both also identify themselves as Latina. They demonstrate their Latino cultural ties in their dress, role in the family, and other stereotypical aspects. Incan parents for Justinia and matrilineal grandmother for Marita are identified as the sources of motivation and positive attitudes towards education, and contributing to the development of critical consciousness, and forms of resilience (Yosso, 2005).

Marita and Justinia refer to themselves as Latinas, yet they both identify themselves strongly with their indigenous heritage and values (as “Cholas”). Clearly, the males of Marita’s family exhibited “a strong sense of Latino masculine pride” which she refers to as machismo; however, males in Justinia’s family did not. Marita identifies strongly with her Inca religious heritage and rejects Catholic values detrimental to women. Justinia identifies closely with Christian religious values and Inca spirituality. Fuligni (2001) found that Latinas’ sense of obligation to family accounted for them having greater motivation than their American peers. Justinia and Marita expressed that their educational achievements were not only for themselves but also for their families.

Experiences with racial and social class discrimination and their deep spirituality contributed to the participants' development of resiliency. Justinia's experiences with ethnic and racial discrimination in elementary and secondary school play a strong role in her motivation to succeed in graduate school and her development of resilience. Marita, blond-haired and fair-skinned, experienced racial discrimination from other students who believed she was the teacher's pet due to her "light coloring." Justinia and Marita also find resilience through their deep spirituality though Justinia's spirituality is directed toward her Christian beliefs while Marita's is grounded in her Incan beliefs. Spirituality has been a foundation for their educational success and has been drawn from their respective religious perspectives.

Politics in Peru impacted various aspects of our participants' attitudes and resilience, and helped develop their critical consciousness, particularly in Justinia's case. She survived her experiences with the violence of the Shining Path and the kidnapping attempt on her brother through the support of her family. Marita also saw the structural violence of poverty in her community and the influence of groups such as The Shining Path on working class attitudes towards violence as a way of gaining political and economic power. Easterbrook (2002) reported that the Shining Path was a significant presence in Latin American Universities in the 1980s and 1990s.

Marita and Justinia are highly socially competent. Justinia demonstrated the insight that she needed to be an active community volunteer to escape the stereotypes and discrimination she faced in her new American community. She has also voluntarily taught Spanish at several local elementary schools for a number of years. On the other hand, Marita's sense of purpose is demonstrated in her willingness to work with homeless people and battered women and children.

Sense of purpose is strong in both Marita and Justinia. Justinia devotes her purpose to religious missions in Latin American countries and to providing a resource for the recent Latin population in her community. We found that much of the difference ties into three aspects of Resiliency Theory (Gonzales, 2003): support of family and teachers, struggle to overcome gender, social class, ethnic and religious prejudices and barriers, and a strong sense of self (particularly from their Incan heritage).

Critical consciousness as defined by Freire (1972, 1998, 2005) is an awareness of the social and political contradictions in the world that characterize the oppression of disenfranchised groups of people, especially the poor, and particularly as they apply to oneself. This awareness also includes the realization of how education can be a tool for personal empowerment. We have long considered that to have a deep understanding of critical consciousness it is necessary to experience oppression or injustice personally. Our research with Marita and Justinia supports this theory. Both experienced oppression and injustices related to gender, social class, politics and religion and were aware of how the privileges and marginalization associated with social class affect people's lives, attitudes toward education, and politics in their country of origin. Justinia and Marita drew from these experiences a realiza-

tion of the need to work for social justice, especially for marginalized people and those living in poverty.

Now we must add to this theory the possibility that to act on critical consciousness one must also be resilient! Or perhaps is it that the foundation of resiliency gained from experiences with adversity also prepares one to be receptive to critical consciousness? Marita and Justinia not only developed critical consciousness, they acted upon it as demonstrated by their enthusiastically positive attitudes toward higher education, their choice to be socially critical teachers, their continued work with the poor and their determination to be somebody other than what their oppressors envisioned.

Voice is a powerful tool supporting resiliency and empowerment. Freire's (1972, 1998) work in Brazil illustrates how when people have voice they can name their realities and experience a process of empowerment. Auerbach (2002) found that when Latino parents were given the opportunity to voice narratives of their struggles as students they built and sustained empowering identities. Justinia and Marita found the telling of their stories to be both cathartic and empowering. Through the process of story-telling they identified their strengths and mission in life for their continued struggles and resilience. In research conducted with marginalized Latinas in Costa Rica, Fregeau (1991) determined that women found a sense of self-appreciation for their courage and resiliency through the telling of their stories. The participants both expressed that the process of telling their stories, of having voice, helped them to critically reflect on their lives and to learn about their strength.

Resiliency, as well as critical consciousness, may be the foundation of the enthusiasm both Justinia and Marita demonstrated towards their graduate school education. Both possessed the attributes that defined a resilient student: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose that Bernard (1997) has described. Although Werner and Smith (1992) in their study of at-risk Hawaiians found that socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds did not play a role in resiliency, Gordon (1996) found that the principal difference between resilient and non-resilient Hispanic students was that the resilient youths had more faith in their cognitive abilities in an urban school setting.

The resiliency to not only survive but to thrive was expressed poignantly when Justinia was asked to respond to why she strived so endlessly to be successful. She gave the following response:

When you make your own boat and your family is in it in the middle of the ocean,  
you do what you have to do to make it work. I am a survivor. I can cry over me,  
or, do what I have to do for my children.

Contrary to the pervasive stereotype that immigrants, especially Latino immigrants devalue education, we found that our Latina participants not only valued education, they were devoted to it. Justinia and Marita became positive examples to their American classmates as well as sources of resiliency and inspiration. They

enthusiastically pursued excellence in their educational performance despite language and cultural barriers. These two women worked diligently and tirelessly towards improving education in local schools and in their children's education. They found their fellow graduate students' complaining attitudes about the demands of their graduate education programs and challenges in their teaching jobs difficult to comprehend. American educators should take note of the stories of these two Latina immigrant women: positive and inspiring examples of immigrants and Latinos.

### Questions for Further Study

The authors are grateful to Marita and Justinia for all we learned from their stories. We are, however, left with additional questions to pursue:

(1) If part of Justinia's and Marita's positive and enthusiastic attitude toward education comes from previous limitations in access to higher education, then is this also a source of motivation for American graduate students who are the first in their family to go to college, or who are members of marginalized groups and have similar obstacles?

(2) Why do American teachers in our graduate classes tend to have negative attitudes towards higher education? Are there graduate students who could also be identified as fitting into the same experience/resulting attitudes as Justinia and Marita?

(3) Do American individuals who experience similar oppression and injustice become teachers? If not, why not? These are, after all, the people who will best be able to relate to students who are "at risk."

(4) Do Latina immigrants with similar experiences but from other countries have similar attitudes and do those who understand critical and social consciousness act upon it? Is this specific to Peruvian women of this generation?

(5) How would the attitudes of non-resilient Latinas and resilient individuals of other backgrounds be similar and different to those of the participants in this study?

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