

# *Igualita que su madre:* A Study on the Educational Relationship Between First Generation Latina College Graduates and Their Mothers

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## INTRODUCTION

This study will investigate the academic relationship between first-generation Latina college graduates and their mothers. Although recent literature suggests that Latinas are outperforming Latinos academically (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011), Latinas still require educational support in order to succeed academically (Beltrán & NCLR, 2011). This study focuses on nine first-generation Latinas who have graduated from four-year universities and the influence their mothers had on their educational trajectories. Specifically, the study investigates the various ways young Latinas who have recently graduated from college, report how their mothers help them thrive academically, not just emotionally. This information will help us further explore how K-12 schools, districts, and communities can help mothers and female guardians support young Latinas who are trying to attain a higher education.

## RESULTS

**College Going Culture:** Latinas understand their homes can be lacking the college and career support that is necessary to move ahead, but seek other ways to acquire this support through either mentors, pre-college programs, clubs, sports, and advanced courses.  
**Mother's vs. Fathers:** Latinas appreciate the independence, support, and trust their mother's provide and acknowledge that many of their father's are more conservative.  
**Stories of Struggle:** Latina immigrant mothers share their own personal stories of struggle with their children in hopes that their lives can be different.  
**Sacrificial Support:** Latina immigrant mothers, regardless of their own education, make the education of their daughters a priority and do what they can to support their daughters.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & CONTACT INFORMATION

My partner, Daniel, and our two daughters Maricela and Cecilia.

My own mother, Maricela, who was the inspiration for this study.

My awesome Committee Chair, Dr. Robert Cooper, who always kept pushing me for more.

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## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How do first-generation Latina college graduates explain or understand their educational journey and academic achievements? How do their immigrant mothers explain or understand their daughter's educational journey and academic achievements? How, if at all, do these understandings differ?
- 2) What lessons, if any, can the stories of first-generation Latina college graduates and their immigrant mothers provide to community and educational leaders to strengthen the educational trajectories of Latina students?

## CONCLUSION

First-generation Latinas who have graduated from four-year universities acknowledge the sacrifices their mothers have made for them, but also recognize that their mothers actions were not the only factor that helped them attain a higher education. The Latinas who were interviewed all mentioned that they sought help from outside programs or individuals who were more aware of what it takes to attain a higher education. Their mothers explained that they did what they could to support their daughters during elementary, middle school, and high school; like providing rides, food, a place to study, and unconditional support. Both mothers and daughters claim that more academic support in terms of mentors, workshops, pre-college programs, and first-year college transitional support would further help the educational trajectories of first-generation college bound Latinas.

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## METHODS

A qualitative design was appropriate because I sought to understand how Latinas make sense of their academic lives. I wanted to make meaning of how Latinas interpret their mother's actions and influence on their academics from their own perspective. This study uses a narrative approach because its intention is to provide an in depth analysis on how mother and daughter interactions have the potential to influence academic decisions (Maxwell, 2013). The interviews were also qualitative in nature, and provided a story-oriented and chronological explanation of how Latina mothers helped their daughters academically over time (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). This study used interviews to obtain how the individual Latina college graduates interpreted and made meaning of the academic relationships they have with their immigrant mothers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A total of 1-2 semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine pre-selected El Monte Union High School graduates, who had recently graduated from a four-year university, and their mothers. All nine student participants were Latina graduates from the El Monte and South El Monte communities who were recruited through social media, email, telephone, and student recommendations. The criteria for student selection was the following:

1. First-generation Latina who had graduated from one of the six high schools in the El Monte Union High School District.
2. Recently graduated (within five years) from a four-year college/university.
3. Have a Latina mother or female guardian who agreed to participate in the study and also be interviewed.

The selected students and their mothers were interviewed with questions that reflected this study's research questions. The goal of the one-to-one interviews with the Latina college graduates was to understand what type of academic support their mothers may have provided their daughter's in their quest to obtain a higher education. The additional and separate interview with the mothers served to further add and clarify what their daughters had expressed. The interview questions asked Latina college graduates to describe how their mothers helped them succeed academically, regardless of their own educational level, as well as what other factors helped them during their educational journeys. The interview questions for the mothers were similar in regards to their role as mothers and the academic support they provided their daughters. As an employee within the El Monte Union High School District I had access to several graduates who had recently graduated from a four-year university. I contacted these students through social media and interviewed them via Google Hangouts and in person depending on their availability.