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Abstract

This paper uses the life history method to narrate the experiences of Camilla, a 19-year-old, first-year student at a four-year university. Camilla emigrated with her mother from El Salvador to the United States during her freshman year of high school. Based on two years of data collection, the author presents Camilla's experiences at different stages, including her childhood in El Salvador, first and last year in high school, and her first year in college. The paper explores the sources and influences of social capital for a low-income, first-generation student and highlights its dynamic and contextual nature. The author argues that the findings have direct implications for the development of college access and readiness policies.

Keywords

Life History, Narrative Research, Qualitative Research, Social Capital, Cultural Identity, Low-Income Student, First-Generation Immigrant, College Access and Readiness, Cultural Wealth, Public Policy, El Salvador

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This paper uses the life history method to narrate the experiences of Camilla, a 19-year-old, first-year student at a four-year university. Camilla emigrated with her mother from El Salvador to the United States during her freshman year of high school. Based on two years of data collection, the author presents Camilla's experiences at different stages, including her childhood in El Salvador, first and last year in high school, and her first year in college. The paper explores the sources and influences of social capital for a low-income, first-generation student and highlights its dynamic and contextual nature. The author argues that the findings have direct implications for the development of college access and readiness policies. Keywords: Life History, Narrative Research, Qualitative Research, Social Capital, Cultural Identity, Low-Income Student, First-Generation Immigrant, College Access and Readiness, Cultural Wealth, Public Policy, El Salvador

Aside from a stray teacher or custodian, the high school's halls are empty. The school day concluded hours ago. The few students who remain sit at a long rectangular table inside the college center waiting to meet their mentors. University pennants clutter the walls; notices for scholarships and college visits clutter the bulletin boards. Camilla, switching between English and Spanish, chats with friends.[1] Her enormous backpack, full of large textbooks and ordered binders, rests on a nearby chair.

Alex, the director of a mentoring program, announces the names of each mentee and then his or her corresponding mentor.[2] I wait to hear my name. After Alex finishes reading the long list, he asks if everyone has a mentor. One student raises her hand. Alex says, "Oh, Camilla, you're with Randy."

I introduce myself to Camilla. We talk about the program. She speaks with bridled excitement. Lulls in the conversation are interrupted by questions: What's college like? What college did you go to? Why are you part of the program? I answer her questions. After talking for 15 minutes, we make arrangements to meet the following week. She wants to review application essays. Just before she leaves, I ask what she wants to do in college. "I'm not sure. I think psychology," she pauses, "That's good, right?"

The transition from high school to college poses significant challenges for all students. They navigate diverse social settings, forge new relationships, and manage increased expectations and responsibilities. For low-income, first-generation immigrant students like Camilla, additional factors frequently exacerbate the transition (Contreras, 2011; Kirst & Reeves Bracco, 2004; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Many attend under-resourced and underperforming high schools that do not support college-going (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002; Tierney & Colyar, 2009). Despite wanting to attend college (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010), they often neither have clear access to the types of knowledge

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

[2] The mentoring program matches students who attend underperforming public high schools in Los Angeles with graduate students and faculty at a nearby university.

necessary to access and succeed in college nor resource brokers like teachers and college counselors to help transition (Conley, 2011; McDonough, 2005; Tierney, 2013). Even though they may arrive to college with a multitude of cultural assets (Gutiérrez, Zitlali Morales, & Martinez, 2009; Moll, 1992; Yosso, 2005), they undertake complex processes including transitioning to college, learning traditional forms of college knowledge, and navigating institutional supports necessary to succeed in postsecondary education (Deil-Amen & Lopez Turley, 2007; Gamoran, López Turley, Turner, & Fish, 2012; St. John & Musoba, 2011; Yosso, 2005).

While important scholarship informs topics like preparation, remediation, and retention (see Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1993; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Long & Boatman, 2013; Relles & Tierney, 2013; Tinto, 2012), few studies have investigated in-depth the first-year experiences of low-income, first-generation immigrant students (Clydesdale, 2007; Stieha, 2010; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Tierney, 2013). Even fewer studies have explored the connections among life experiences during high school and college (Kim & Schneider, 2005; Tierney, 2013). As a result, this study examines the experiences of Camilla, a low-income, first-generation immigrant, as she adapts to her first year of college. The study employs the life history method, a long-established method that prioritizes a participant's first-person accounts of significant life experiences (Tierney & Clemens, 2012). The examination of experiences across time and contexts allows for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of her first-year experiences (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). The paper, focusing specifically on the sources and influences of social capital, investigates the dynamic and contextual nature of social capital as Camilla navigates new and familiar social settings and interacts with family members, friends, and institutional agents.

Conducting a Life History

I mentored Camilla throughout her senior year in high school. Aside from holidays, we met weekly or bi-weekly from September until March. While I assisted Camilla with her essays, applications, and college search, our relationship, from the beginning, was not dependent solely on my ability to help her navigate the application process. She adeptly sought aid from several committed individuals: her college counselor helped Camilla locate scholarships and complete applications; her Spanish teacher translated difficult passages from financial aid forms; and the director of the mentoring program spoke in Spanish about the process with Camilla's mom. I was neither Camilla's peer nor her teacher or family member. I was someone she liked who had minimal interaction with individuals in her daily life. Every week, I showed up to the school library where we reviewed essays or college applications. She asked questions; sometimes the questions related to the application process but more often they pertained to personal issues. The choice to undertake a life history with Camilla was based on our relationship, which began as cordial and respectful and became friendly and good-humored.[3] I wanted her to succeed and was inquisitive about how she would transition to college.

In this paper, I present the lived experiences of Camilla and her interpretations of them. Two research questions guided the study: What are the sources of social capital as a first-generation, low-income student transitions to college? And, how, if at all, do they influence the transition from high school to college? Over a period of nine months, beginning during the summer before Camilla matriculated, I collected data including interviews, observations, and

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[3] The life history was originally part of a symposium about the first-year experiences of college students at the annual meeting of the Association of Educational Research (AERA).

documents. We communicated via email and text messages. I had access to her Facebook page and school assignments. I collected over 20 hours of semi-structured interview data (Kvale, 2007) as well as fieldnotes of formal and informal meetings. We met, ranging between one to four hours, every week. Throughout the first few months, I used thematic interview protocols— for instance, protocols regarding friends or family—to structure our dialogues (see Appendix). Even during semi-structured interviews, we always concluded with informal exchanges. The discussions varied. Sometimes we reviewed class assignments; other times we talked about how to resolve college or family issues, such as drinking with friends or going home on the weekends.

Data analysis, which occurred concurrent to data collection, involved three stages: data reduction, data display, and final interpretation and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, *data reduction* involved "selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). This process included transcribing interviews, writing fieldnotes and memos, and developing codes. I used Atlas.ti, computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), to organize, store, present, and map data. Second, *data display*, the graphical representation of data reduction, facilitated interpretation. Computer software allowed me to visualize and compare connections among codes and themes. Third, *final interpretation and verification* occurred as I returned to original data sources as well as employed strategies to improve trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, I consulted with colleagues—doctoral students and professors—to ensure the credibility of interpretations. I conferred with Camilla to verify information and discuss analyses.

All three data analysis stages occurred in a circular, not linear, fashion (Corwin & Clemens, 2012). As the process continued, Camilla and I relied less on predetermined interview protocols. Our conversations occurred organically based on Camilla's weekly experiences. During our dialogues, emergent themes reoccurred, such as managing the balance between school commitments and social life, navigating duties to her family, and struggling with her need to succeed. At the conclusion of the project, Camilla read and corrected factual and interpretive errors in order to improve trustworthiness (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tierney & Clemens, 2011; Wolcott, 1990). Likewise, as a form of triangulation, I used interview, observation, and document data to improve the accuracy of findings.

Narrative research, in general, and the life history method, in particular, have limitations. The aforementioned strategies illustrate my attempts to maximize trustworthiness and limit errors. However, while reading and untangling the text, consider two significant limitations: First, when discussing issues like equity and access, conversations must account for factors like class, race, place, power, gender, and language. I am a White, privileged male who, at the time, attended a well-known research university. My social position influenced how I designed and conducted the study, how Camilla and I interacted, and what we discussed. Second, the study relied on Camilla's life stories and her interpretations of them. While I collected various data sources—e.g., spoke with teachers and professors, observed her at high school and college, and reviewed class assignments and social media—I prioritized interview data. The project, for example, occurred across two years; the content, however, spanned Camilla's entire life, across locations and settings. As a result, the quality of the study, in large part, depends on three interrelated factors: Camilla as a credible narrator; me as a skilled interviewer and researcher; and, the text as an adequate representation of our interactions and the research process. I have attempted to organize the paper and present the study in a manner that allows you, the reader, the ability to formulate answers to the above factors and, as a result, judge the study's trustworthiness.

Narrating a Life History

Every story has many possible accounts. Laurel Richardson (1997) discusses crystals to highlight the multiple realities available: "Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within the themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions," she writes, "What we see depends upon our angle of repose" (p. 92). My social position impacted not only data collection but also editorial decisions; as a result, the life history is a contextually bound artifact recreating the life of Camilla as well as our relationship (Tierney & Clemens, 2012). Like previous life histories (Wolcott, 1983), I reorganized information for the purposes of improving presentation and highlighting predominant themes; however, I did so in as few instances as possible. Aside from removing repetitive discourse markers, such as "uh," "um," and "like," I did not alter interview data.

I do not always present data uniformly or chronologically. First, switching between third- to first-person perspectives, I intersperse my voice and Camilla's. For example, I narrate passages in order to provide context. I present Camilla's voice to describe critical people and experiences. Second, I purposefully reconfigure data in order to facilitate unique connections. Camilla's experiences in and understandings of El Salvador, for instance, are not static or removed relics of a past life. Rather, they are dynamic and present thoughts and feelings constantly being reshaped by her surroundings. Life history allows the participant to reconstruct experiences across time and place, thus revealing "the totality of interconnected relations of which the social world is composed" (Desmond, 2014). As such, a chronological presentation of data is not quite right for Camilla's story; it oversimplifies the dynamic and relational ways in which an individual experiences social settings (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005).

Creating a Policy-Relevant Life History

Given demographic projections, low-income and Latino student groups—two populations experiencing the largest population increases in the United States—will also have the lowest educational outcomes, including high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Nuñez & Kim, 2012; Perna & Thomas, 2008). At the same time, policymakers acknowledge the need for increased college graduates in order to meet workforce demands and compete globally (Tierney & Hentschke, 2011). Georgetown Public Policy Institute (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013), for instance, projects that, by 2020, 65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education or training after high school. Considering current graduation rates, the United States will experience a shortfall of five million workers. Demographic changes along with inadequate pathways to college and career require scholars and policymakers to reexamine the multiple layers—including students, families, schools, communities, and public policies—that influence student success (Gamoran et al., 2012; Louie, 2005; Perna & Thomas, 2008).

How might a sample of one inform public policy? Qualitative research, in general, and life history, in particular, provides necessary context to inform complex social problems and design, implementation, and evaluation of public policy (Clemens & Tierney, forthcoming; McLaughlin, 1990; Tierney & Clemens, 2011). As Datnow (2006) notes, policy must address people and the settings they inhabit. Moreover, the emic approach, which focuses on an insider's point of view—in contrast to the etic approach, which emphasizes the outsider's perspective—provides unique insights (Donmoyer, 2012). While quantitative researchers often examine cause-and-effect questions, qualitative researchers pursue an opposite approach: "These scholars often start with events that have occurred in the real world and move backwards to ask about their causes" (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012, p. 42). Through the use of

critical cases, cases that strategically inform policy issues, scholars have the ability to provide practical knowledge to better design public policy (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Simons, 2015).

Just as life history has the opportunity to inform policy, the method has the ability to shape the ways policymakers think about and understand the lives of individuals and, as a result, policy issues. A life history acts as a portal, a way of understanding cultural groups through an individual (Tierney, 1998). The stories of individuals serve a vital role to guide both discourse and collective action (Fischer, 2003; Mayer, 2014). Mayer (2014) states:

> Those who would move collective action seek to pull their audience from their seats onto the stage, transforming them from interested by-standers to actors in an unfolding drama. In one way or another, they try to persuade their listeners that their action and, more specifically, their collective action, is what will determine how the story ends. The message is simple: This is our story to write. (p. 130)

The scholar reminds us that life history serves dual purposes: First, *life history as process* allows the subject to define his or her story and, in doing so, be an active participant. Second, *life history as product* has the ability to incite various audiences to action. From study of a Native American with AIDS to the portrayal of a disabled woman (Frank, 2000; Tierney, 1993), the method—and subsequent variations—has a tradition of presenting the stories of underserved individuals and revealing the social inequities they experience. Given negative stereotypes that often dominate policy discussions of low-income, first-generation Latino students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), Camilla's experiences serve as a counter-narrative (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Villenas, 2012; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). They provide a unique prism to view current and future policy decisions. As policymakers discuss strategies to improve pathways to college and career, Camilla illustrates the opportunities and barriers that first-generation students encounter and provides necessary insight regarding potential reforms.

Examining the Sources and Influences of Social Capital

One way to examine the transition from high school to college is to consider the people with whom students interact, the resources they access, and how relationships and resources influence college access and readiness. Social capital has provided a useful theoretical lens among social scientists to examine the influence of social ties on the exchange of resources (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Burt, 2005; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Lin, 1999, 2001; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

Dominant Social Capital

Scholars have provided a variety of definitions for social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Two, in particular—Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman—have strongly influenced contemporary sociological discussions of social capital. Bourdieu (1986), who popularized the concept, defines it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 21). Bourdieu (1986) focuses on an individual's ability to access resources that inhere in groups and institutions. He argues that social—along with cultural and economic—capital helps the middle and upper class retain their class status (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Tightly constructed networks maintain their power because of their ability to convert social capital into economic capital and to exclude others from access (Bourdieu, 1986). The usefulness of social capital, then, directly

relates to an individual's ability to access resources within social networks and also the quality of the resources (Portes, 1998). Quality, for Bourdieu, depends on the ability of social capital to translate into economic capital. Think of a recent Ivy League graduate whose professor has strong ties with a local judge. The connection leads to a law clerkship and, as a result, increased career prospects. The example demonstrates how social capital leads to economic capital. It also highlights the types of networks, as Bourdieu contends, to which middle- and upper-class groups have access.

In contrast to Bourdieu's focus on an individual within larger social structures, sociologist James Coleman (1990) limits his focus. He defines social capital as "the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person" (p. 300). The scholar focuses on the relationship between social capital and child development: "As Coleman described it, social capital within the family—for example, the investment of time and effort in shared activities or helping with homework—may be conceived of as investment in children" (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997, p. 581). Coleman's (1990) conception of social capital is inherently positive. Families support the growth of children. Community involvement, such as participating in after-school activities and attending church, contribute. Like Bourdieu (1986), Coleman stresses the role of dense networks; however, rather than focusing on their role to maintain power, he views them as a means to maintain trust and support collective interests (Ainsworth, 2002; Coleman, 1990). He ignores the negative aspects of group membership such as the pressure to conform to group norms or the duty to reciprocate favors (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Wilson, 1987). While each scholar's version presents unique nuances, at its core, social capital is the "investment in social relations with an expected return" (Lin, 2001, p. 29).

Based on extant scholarship, social capital divides into four broad resource categories—information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement—that exist due to relationships between individuals or groups (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999, 2001). First, social ties facilitate the exchange of *information*. In relation to teenagers, a teacher or counselor may provide information about an internship or scholarship. Second, social connections may provide *influence*. A family friend, for instance, may provide a recommendation for a teenager for employment. Third, the *social credentials* of an individual may provide recognition of another individual's merit. A well-known high school coach may recommend one of his players to a college coach. Fourth, social capital provides *reinforcement*. A youth pastor provides motivations when he or she encourages a student to complete college applications. These four benefits imbue social capital with significance.

Non-Dominant Social Capital

Traditional capital theories (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Coleman, 1988) help explain the importance of social ties; however, with such an emphasis on dominant social structures, they often fail to account for the role of non-dominant social capital that inhere in relationships with family and community (Giroux, 1983; González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Yosso, 2005).[4] For a low-income, first-generation immigrant student like Camilla, whose family and cultural background play a significant role in her life, non-dominant capital produces a variety of resources, resources that include support, resilience, guidance, and cultural knowledge and belonging (Gamoran et al., 2012; Menjívar, 2000; Moll, 1992; Paris, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Consider, for instance, the aspirational capital a daughter

[4] For argumentative purposes, I use the terms "dominant" and "non-dominant" to categorize cultural groups and, by extension, their social networks. I do not wish to imply that social networks—or actors within them—simply divide into either-or categories. Rather, the two terms act as shorthand to discuss social capital theory. For a more in-depth treatment of the topic, see Carter (2003, 2007).

receives from her mother, who sacrifices personal goals in order to provide opportunities for the family (Yosso, 2005).[5] Non-dominant capital does not always convert to economic capital; however, it serves critical roles in relation to college access and readiness.

"Bridging" and "bonding" social capital explain how cultural groups exchange resources across and within networks (Lin, 1999). *Bridging social capital* refers to an individual or group's ability to access resources from different, heterogeneous social networks, for instance, a low-income Latina student who attends and benefits from a prestigious university (Putnam, 2000). Social position and network access are critical factors as individuals must locate bridges to other networks. *Bonding social capital*, in contrast, refers to connections within a homogenous group, for example, an ethnic enclave of Salvadoran immigrants in Los Angeles. It describes the strength of a community to maintain social ties, support collective interests, and sustain cultural identities. Bridging capital relies on inclusion; bonding capital focuses on exclusion. More colloquially, Putnam observes, "Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40" (p. 23). Bonding and bridging capital assume an important role when one considers the multiple contexts first-generation immigrant students navigate, the diverse networks they access, and the importance of network resources.

Structural holes explain the gaps between networks. Burt (2005) observes, "A structural hole between two groups need not mean that people in the groups are unaware of one another. It means only that the people are focused on their own activities such that they do not attend to the activities of people in the other group…People on either side of a structural hole circulate in different flows of information" (p. 16). If bridging social capital is so important for college access, how do students connect with heterogeneous networks? Theorists offer *brokerage* as possible solution (Burt, 2005, 2010). The term refers to "the general process by which an organization connects an individual to another individual, to another organization, or to the resources they contain" (Small, 2009, p. 19). Resource brokers, then, operate as bridges to either dominant or non-dominant capital (Burt, 2005). Stanton-Salazar (2011) defines dominant brokers as institutional agents, those who inhabit "one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority" (p. 1067). Examples of dominant brokers include teachers, counselors, and professors. Peers, as members of heterogeneous networks who connect resources, also act as brokers. As individuals seek opportunities, they rely on brokers to provide access to social capital (Burt, 1997; Kim & Schneider, 2005; Small, 2009).

The Influences of Social Capital

Focusing on Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) description of social capital, the concept fits within a larger framework—including cultural capital, fields, and habitus—to describe a theory of practice. Considering experiences of a low-income, first-generation immigrant, habitus, which I term cultural identity, is critical to social capital.[6]

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[5] Robert Courtney Smith (2006) refers to this as the "immigrant bargain," defined as "the expectation that children will redeem their immigrant parents' sacrifice through their own success" (p. 275).

[6] While the paper focuses on social capital and habitus, Bourdieu presents a theory of practice that also includes cultural capital and fields (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). First, cultural capital refers to non-monetary resources that benefit individuals and groups (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lareau, 2003b). Bourdieu divides cultural capital into three categories: embodied (e.g., knowledge, language, and self-presentation), objectified (e.g., material objects like books, furniture, and albums), and institutionalized (e.g., academic qualifications like degrees and credentials). While theoretical distinctions separate social and cultural capital, they often blur in practice (Lin, 1999; Perna & Titus, 2005). Recall the four types of resources that exist in social networks: information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement. Information, when it is exchanged from one to another becomes an embodied form of cultural capital.

Cultural identity pertains to a person's understanding of self within groups and communities (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284). It involves questions like "Who am I," "How do I fit in," and "What do I want to be." Individuals construct multiple identities that are both durable and dynamic (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giddens, 1991). That is, people form master narratives about their lives (Taylor, 1989); however, the stories develop based on day-to-day experiences as well as understandings of mutually involved categories like class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Carter, 2006; Goffman, 1959; Patterson, 2015; Suad Nasir, 2012). Hames-García (2000) notes, "Group memberships do not simply intersect; they blend, constantly and differently, expanding one another and mutually constituting one another's meanings" (p. 106). Identity coordinates individual action within and among social structures (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; LiPuma, 1993). It also directs individuals to specific sources and types of capital. First-generation students like Camilla undergo identity transformations—magnified by previously mentioned factors like learning new forms of cultural capital—as they process new and old relationships. The resources individuals acquire alter their varied social positions and how they view other resources (Carter, 2010).

By widening the analytic lens to include social capital and cultural identity, I demonstrate the complex cultural processes that occur as a first-generation student traverses new and familiar social settings. Just as social capital influences access to resources, the resources also augment the ways in which individuals make sense of themselves in the world. In this way, social capital and cultural identity are involved in a coterminous relationship (Sewell, 1992).

Findings

The findings divide into three major sections: The first section, "Adapting to Life in the United States," presents an overview of Camilla's transition from El Salvador to the United States. The second, "Learning from Family," focuses on the key family figures in Camilla's life. The last section, "Transitioning to College," focuses on the influence of social capital as Camilla navigates new and familiar settings. After each section, I provide a brief interpretation of Camilla's experiences.

Adapting to Life in the United States

For Camilla, the transition from a middle class life in El Salvador to a lower class life in the United States was difficult.

Leaving El Salvador

It was sad because my friends went to say goodbye to me on the airport, so that was really dramatic and they gave me like this album with all the pictures of ourselves since we were little kids. I was just thinking when I was going to be back to El Salvador. In El Salvador,

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Second, a field defines the rules of a social setting and shapes social relations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Lareau, 2003a; Swartz, 1997). Fields provide a sophisticated understanding of how, when, where, and why individuals value, access, and use different capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau, 2003a). In other words, a teenager is likely to act differently when in a classroom versus at a friend's house. To simplify the discussion, I refer to fields as contexts. Each component combines in unique combinations to stimulate individual action: "[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (or action)" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101; Musoba & Baez, 2009, p. 154). Bourdieu identifies the influences of social capital in context. Individuals, as social beings, construct meanings through experiences with people across settings (Bourdieu, 1990).

I grew up with the same kids and we were in a bubble. I don't know when is going to be the day when I'd be back. I never thought how it's going to be here. I just thought about the day I'd be back.

The First Year in the United States

The first week I just felt like it was vacation, you know. I didn't feel like I was going to be here. Then the second week we went to Madison High School and I started. They gave me a test and put me in ESL 3. They gave me all these classes that I felt were not necessary or important. For example, they gave me woodshop [she looks puzzled and raises her shoulders]. I couldn't even cut wood. I didn't have friends. Everyone was different.

The first year, it was more about adapting myself with everything. Here my friends were different. One of my friends got pregnant. Another one was having her baby. I saw kids get high behind the gym. It was so different. I got used to it, but it's hard in the beginning. My counselor didn't even want to give me honors classes because I was ESL. The first year, pretty much, I thought people thought I was dumb. I wanted to go back to El Salvador; every single day I wanted to go back. My mom got so annoyed with me crying every day that she asked, "Do you want to stay or go back?" But I'm glad now. If I didn't stay, I wouldn't be here and I love it here and I'm proud.

Returning to El Salvador

I went back to El Salvador during senior year for prom. It was fun. I saw all my friends. I also felt awkward. The first thing I did was go to prom. I felt out of place because I had been away. It was like they had their own conversations. All my friends were different and all they cared about were material things. Who's the prettiest? Who has the best shoes? I felt it was kind of senseless. I feel like I am stuck between two worlds. I do not feel like I am myself here. But now when I go back, my friends make fun of my accent. They don't know how hard it is. My friends are like some of the girls here. Do you know what I mean? They are snobby. They don't know what I've gone through. They don't see it. I feel in-between.

Adapting to High School

At 6:00 a.m., her alarm beeps loudly. Camilla rolls over and hits the snooze button. Her mom enters, "Camillita, levántate." Camilla showers and then puts on jeans and a sweater. She walks downstairs where she has bread and coffee with her mom, who works at a non-profit that assists Salvadoran immigrants. The two talk about the upcoming day. Her mom hears the morning bell ringing from the school only blocks away: "Apúrate que vas a llegar tarde!" Camilla grabs her backpack; as she runs out of the apartment, her mom hugs and kisses her, a morning tradition.

To get to school, Camilla walks three blocks. Single-family homes and apartment buildings flank the streets. An eclectic mix, including young bohemians, middle class white couples, and working class Latino families, populate the neighborhood. Camilla does not know yet, but in the summer, because of steadily increasing gentrification and rents, her family—her mom, sister, and she—will move to an apartment adjacent to downtown. As she waits at the stoplight, she thinks about the day and what she needs to do. She lists each class and tries to remember if she did all the homework assignments.

In front of her is James Madison High School. The only object that looms larger than the surrounding trees is the school itself, a massive building built in the early 1900s and inspired by Victorian gothic architecture. The school population is comprised primarily of Latino

students. Twenty percent of the student body is classified as English language learners. By the time Camilla graduates, nearly one third of her classmates will have dropped out of the school.

She attends school from 7:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. During nutrition, a 20-minute break to eat snacks, she visits the college center and talks to Ms. Mitchell, the college counselor. At the end of the day, Camilla visits Mrs. Rodriguez, her former Advanced Placement Spanish teacher, and asks a few questions about college applications. "Those were the two people who I needed to tell what was going on in high school. I connected a lot with them," Camilla says.

Afterwards, Camilla goes to ballet, which she pronounces ba-yay— her pronunciation is perhaps a remnant of the first 15 years of her life spent in El Salvador. She arrives home at 6:30. She watches television while she completes homework. At the end of the day, she lays in bed: "My room I always shared with my sister. She had her bed, and I had my bed. And it was kind of small. We had the desk with the computer, and just that." Before she falls asleep, she and her sister, 10 years her senior, recap the day's events. When I ask her about the things she misses most in college, she admits, "I miss that. Talking with my sister before bed."

The Application Process

As Camilla progresses through the application and financial aid process, we meet nearly every week, usually in the college center. She plans weeks ahead of deadlines in order to provide adequate time for editing application essays. She has friends, teachers, and me read the drafts and provide feedback. She asks a few teachers to write letters of recommendation.

Camilla submits her applications at the end of November. Her essays, grade point average, and letters of recommendation are all exceptional. Her SAT scores are below average compared to the previous incoming freshmen classes at the schools to which she applies. Still, she is optimistic and excited to receive news from the colleges.

She waits for good news and receives bad news. Schools of all types—the reach, match, and back-up schools—reject her. Camilla is upset and emails Alex; they contact several universities. The schools misread her international records. One school reconsiders. Camilla accepts admission into a private, prestigious four-year institution located 30 miles from her high school. Because the expected financial contribution of her mother is low, Camilla, who is a documented immigrant and eligible for aid, receives full assistance, a mix of scholarships, work-study, and student loans.

The Transition to College

During the summer between high school and college, Camilla attends the Bridge Program, an intensive month-long series of classes and workshops. The program, located on a university campus, facilitates the transition from high school to college for first-generation college students.

She wakes up at 4:00 am every morning to read and re-read the day's assignments, a chapter from Acuña's *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* or Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," for instance.

"Sometimes," she discloses, "I don't understand what they are saying. I use the computer to look up words. But it's getting easier." To get to the university, she takes a 30-minute bus ride. "I read on the bus," she pauses and smiles, "or sometimes I just stare out the window."

In the morning class, she participates during discussions. Both of her instructors tell me that she is a good, hardworking student. Camilla's biggest worry is an upcoming assignment in which she must speak in front of the entire class. In the afternoon sessions, she attends to sessions about note-taking, financial aid, and how to read syllabi.

Her aunt, who moved to the United States 25 years ago, parks her car on a city street adjacent to the university and waits for Camilla to finish class, so they can drive home: "We talk about everything, but she gets really passionate when it comes to religion. My aunt likes to read a lot. She's opinionated. She grew up in a Catholic school and didn't like it. She was kind of like the rebel one, so the nuns would punish her all the time." When Camilla arrives home, she does homework from 5:00 to 10:00, with a break in between. "Then I watch tv. I watch telenovelas," she says embarrassingly, "They're funny. That's my treat for the day."

Halfway through July, I ask Camilla if she would like to be a part of a life history during her first year of college. I explain that we will need to meet every week and that her perspective will be critical to the project. She agrees. When I ask her if she is nervous about starting college, she jokingly exclaims, "I am homesick already, Randy!" After Camilla leaves, I photocopy a paper she wrote for class. The first sentence reads, "When it comes to my identity, I describe myself as a woman, Salvadoran."

Interpreting the Transition to the United States

The accumulation of various forms of capital—social, cultural, and economic—influence how first-generation immigrants incorporate within the context of mainstream society (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Portes & Zhou, 1993).[7] Portes and Zhou (1993) state, "modes of incorporation consist of the complex formed by the host government; the values and prejudices of the receiving society; and the characteristics of the coethnic community" (p. 83). Camilla's experiences demonstrate some of the challenges immigrants encounter upon arriving to the United States. In contrast to common assumptions about immigrants—that low-income immigrants in the United States were low-income residents in their countries of origin—her family was middle class in El Salvador. Camilla had difficulty transitioning to a low-income neighborhood.

For first-generation immigrants, schools operate as the primary source of bridging capital: "While parents focus most of their energies on making ends meet in the new society, forging ties first and foremost with people of similar ethnic backgrounds or immigrant status, immigrant youth are out and about in the new culture, attending American schools, interacting with American teachers and peers" (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008, p. 70). Attending an underperforming high school has a significant influence on Camilla's transition to the United States. In contrast to her friends in El Salvador, two of her high school friends had children. Her peers' actions, including drug abuse and dropping out, suggest the presence of downward leveling norms, which "operate to keep members of a down-trodden group in place and force the more ambitious to escape from it" (Portes, 1998, p. 17). Scholars hypothesize negative norms occur as a result of generations of discrimination; the process reinforces the importance of group solidarity, a form of bonding social capital, as a result of adversity (Bourgois, 2003; Portes, 1998). Valenzuela (1999) describes a similar process of "subtractive schooling" during which schools reduce resources available to students through the devaluation of language and culture. The section foreshadows a recurring theme—Camilla's desire to defy stereotypes.

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[7] Although beyond the scope of this paper, the notion of *incorporation* and *modes of incorporation* draw from discussions of segmented assimilation, a popular—and often criticized— theoretical framework to explain how individuals and groups incorporate into a society. Assimilation occurs in three forms: upward mobility to dominant culture with lessening of ethnic culture; downward mobility to non-dominant cultures; and, upward mobility with retention of ethnic culture (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Scholars have critiqued the theory for reducing complex concepts into static variables, over-simplifying the dynamic nature of culture and identity, and reinforcing negative stereotypes of low-income neighborhoods (Kelley, 1997).

Resource brokers, individuals or organizations that bridge structural holes, served a vital role to college access and readiness for Camilla. A coterie of mentors helped Camilla throughout the application process. Ms. Mitchell, her college counselor, and Mrs. Rodriguez, her Spanish teacher, helped with the college application process. Alex, the director of the mentoring program, contacted colleges when a problem occurred with her international records. One of the characteristics of resource brokers is their understanding of resources inherent in two separate networks and ability to navigate both networks. In this regard, both Mrs. Rodriguez and Alex spoke to Camilla in Spanish to convey important information. She also benefited from a college bridge program in which the curriculum connected with her cultural experiences.

While scholarship often presents the positive role of resource brokerage (Burt, 2005), Camilla's experiences at the beginning of her high school career indicate the negative effects. As she incorporated into new contexts, school counselors placed her in low-level classes. The discriminatory action reinforced low expectations.

Last, the transition from El Salvador to the United States highlights the contextual and dynamic nature of social capital. Social networks include "dynamic processes, for these networks do not exist in a social vacuum; they are simultaneously affected by the context that immigrants encounter and by the social positions of the individuals involved" (Menjívar, 2000, p. 4). Once in the United States, Camilla yearned to return to her country of origin; however, once she did, subtle changes arose as a result of her exposure to new forms of social capital. The findings confirm the influence of social capital on cultural identity. And yet, as her class essay demonstrates, she identified as Salvadoran.

Learning from Family

When we spoke, Camilla often referenced El Salvador. Her family represented a connection to her past. She frequently discussed her sister, grandmother, and mother.

Camilla's Sister

When my sister went to college to become a dentist, she lived at home. My mom worked three jobs to pay for it. I don't think she wanted to become a dentist. She was kind of forced. My aunt—she works as a dental assistant—was the one who told my sister to be like a dentist.

One of the reasons why [my sister] moved was because she couldn't find a job in El Salvador. It's really bad. I mean you graduate from college and a lot of people, like almost everybody, doesn't find jobs, and so that's why people end up doing something different that is not related to their careers. And my sister, she has always done ballet. And so she, for a time, she spent most of the time doing that, like a professional dancer. She got married in Chile and then moved to Washington D.C. She started working for a company, something like telephones. Then they got divorced. When we came here, she moved to be with us.

In order for her to work as a dentist in America, she has to do two more years and a lot of other stuff. I don't know, like a huge process. So she usually gets disappointed about that because she spent like eight years doing her career and not being able to perform that. So, I feel like that's one of the reasons I want to do something about it. I also feel like bad about it. You know, spend eight years studying and then not being able to perform that. It's just sad. The problem is if she go back to school she is going to be doing part-time. My mom and my sister are the ones that help pay for that apartment. It's just, like my mom really wants her to go and be a full-time, but my mom cannot afford to pay the rent of the apartment by herself.

Camilla's Grandmother

I think a lot about my grandmother. She lived with us, so I felt like the first few years, like four or five, I felt more connected with my grandmother because my mom was working three jobs and I didn't really see her. She took care of me. She cooked. She made chicken and, like, typical food from El Salvador too. She did pupusas and plátanos, and she would make fruit juices. She loved chocolate. She would also give it to me to spy on my sister when she had dates. Can you believe that? One time, my sister had a boyfriend, and no one liked him. My grandma had this superstition that if you hung a broom on the back of the door it would sweep them away. And, actually, it worked. He didn't come back.

She was the one who wanted me to become a ballerina—well she and my sister. She really liked it. She put all the ballet tapes on. She played Carmen. I would watch it every single day with her. And every time my aunts from over there they would come over my grandmother would tell them, "Oh come on Camilla, perform for them." She just loved it.

She died of cancer. That was really big. I feel like when she died everything change for me [her voice quivers while she speaks. Tears fill her eyes]. Like my mom got depressed and then everything started to change around.

Camilla's Mom

Everything started when my grandmother died. That was the part when my mom was really bad and even thought about killing herself. Sometimes she just doesn't care. For example, like a year ago, she stopped taking her medication, so she didn't want to change. She wanted to go to work in her pajamas. She put a sweater on and then I couldn't. I tell her not to go out, but she doesn't care. It's hard to tell you, to express it.

That was one of the reasons we came here. It was just her and me. And then my aunt was here and my sister was here. So, I couldn't do anything for her. I felt really useless being next to her and not being able to do anything for her.

Interpreting the Role of Family

Family serves as a significant source of social capital. Strong kinship ties facilitate the exchange of non-dominant social capital. Camilla's story is, in part, about the matriarchs in her family. Her mother and sister joined Camilla's aunt in Los Angeles, forming a dependable, compact social network. As others have observed (Portes, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Yosso, 2005), foundational capital theories do not adequately value the role of Camilla's family members. Scholars employing such theories have examined relationships vis-á-vis their ability to generate economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Coleman, 1988). To the extent that her family could access or mobilize resources to ensure her social mobility, their capital is inadequate. In contrast, they demonstrate different resources. Camilla and her family are not deficient or "disadvantaged," words that have become synonymous for students of color (Martinez & Rury, 2012).

Camilla benefits from the cultural wealth of her family, including navigational, aspirational, resistant, and familial capital (Yosso, 2005). Her grandmother instilled a sense of cultural pride. Her sister, mother, and aunt display creative uses of social capital in order to compensate for a labor market that, in large part, refuses access. Both her sister and mother worked low-income jobs to support Camilla's education. Her mother even offered to pay for Camilla's summer school. Despite being able to pay the rent without Camilla's sister's income, their mom encouraged Camilla's sister to return to school. The importance of education was clear.

Camilla's family compelled her to succeed. Her sister experienced travails in regard to her college degree. They provided an example of barriers for first-generation immigrants in spite of hard-work and good intentions. Based on Camilla's class status and high school performance, research predicts she is less likely to attend a four-year university. However, her family and their experiences exhibited a strong influence over her college choices. They had high expectations, which defined the scope of educational possibilities (McDonough, 1997).

The strong social ties included negative aspects. Dense bonding capital—along with unfriendly modes of incorporation such as restrictive and discriminatory policies and inadequate access to quality jobs and schools—lessoned the family's ability to access dominant networks (Fernández-Kelly, 1995; Menjívar, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Her aunt, mother, and sister sacrificed in order to live in the United States. As a result, not only does Camilla feel obligated to repay their sacrifices, as the next section shows, she also had frequent identity conflicts as she reconciled her own aspirations and expectations with those of her family.

Transitioning to College

From leaving El Salvador to adapting to life in the United States, Camilla's family provided important social capital as she adjusted. The bonding capital served as an anchor. As she transitioned to college, her family continued to play a central role; however, she also struggled as she traversed new and familiar settings.

The First Semester

On move-in day her whole family—mother, sister, aunt, and uncle—came to campus. "My mom and sister helped unpack. My mom was really excited," Camilla laughs, "She unpacked everything before I even knew it. My aunt couldn't come in. She didn't want to show her feelings. She doesn't like to let her emotions show." Camilla plans to go home occasionally, but not every weekend: "I don't get anything done when I go home. I just eat and watch TV."

She takes five classes. She is most excited about psychology, a class for her major. After a few weeks, she develops routines. Camilla describes her average Monday:

> I wake up like around 6:00. I go to take a shower and then, like, around 6:45 I start walking to Smith Hall, which is really far away. I have my philosophy class and then I go to the library to wait for psychology. I go to psychology class and then I eat and then I go to the library before anatomy and then I have my class for anatomy class and then I go to eat and then I come back to the library.

The library, she tells, is the place where she gets most of her work done.

I ask, "You can't work in your room?"

"Mayra plays music all the time. If I'm doing homework, and she's doing homework, she likes to do homework with music, and I can't concentrate with the music so I just come here. I spend most of my time here," she frowns playfully.

While the time she spends doing homework in comparison to socializing frustrates her, she enjoys the academic setting, even the library:

> Whenever I come to the library, everyone is studying. But when I went at Madison, nobody was studying. Or, nobody needed to study a lot. The schoolwork wasn't as hard. It was more just being there. Here it is more professional. Professors walk around. Once the governor and mayor were here. I enjoy that.

I begin to ask another question, and Camilla interjects quickly: "Do you think I study too much?"

Unsure how to answer, I ask, "Do you have a balance between work and fun?"

"No. I haven't been able to say, 'It's time to hang out.' Or, for example, yesterday I wasn't even able to just sit and say, 'I'm going to have an hour to eat.'" Not even an hour. Twenty minutes because I had to be somewhere else and then somewhere else," she stops and looks away.

"What do your friends think?"

"Sometimes I wanna study and my friends, my friends tell me I'm a party pooper." She raises her voice and shakes her clinched fists, I hate that! Urrrrrr! It just drives me crazy. It's just, I don't know how they do it. I feel like I'm, you know, just a hardworking person. I think I'm smart. But I have to work about it. I mean I have to work hard. It's not like I'm given. You know what I mean? They have a midterm and they are just hanging out around the school and I cannot do that because I feel like, "Oh my gosh! I should be studying for my midterm."

A University Birthday Tradition

As Camilla walks from the bathroom to her dorm room, she sees them. A week earlier, Camilla described a university tradition to me: "At midnight on your birthday, they carry you from your dorm and throw you in the fountain. Randy," she says resolutely, "I don't want to get thrown in the fountain. It's cold at night!"

Camilla, knowing the group of friends' purpose, pretends she does not see them. She rushes to her room and locks the door. Nevertheless, she is secretly happy. Earlier in the day, disappointed about not being part of the midnight tradition, she texted, ":-(Now I want to be thrown in." And now, at 11:30 pm, they are coming.

Mayra, her roommate, unlocks the door. They carry Camilla to the fountain, a five-minute walk from her dorm. As she drops into the chilly water, her friends sing "Happy Birthday": "It was fun. And then after that, me and Mayra went to get pizza."

Camilla's Roommate

During the summer before college begins, Camilla sends an email about her roommate:

> Her name is Mayra. She is half Filipina and Hispanic. She is friendly and I do not know anything else haha…. I have been talking to her through face book and two times on the phone to arrange everything. We met in the Latino overnight. We were the only ones without parents on that day, we sat together and started talking.

She is excited that her roommate is part Latina: "I feel like we will have something in common."

During the first few weeks, Mayra invites her to do things. Now the invitations occur infrequently, if at all: "I always had to study. I guess she got tired of me saying 'no.'" One month into the semester, the relationship between the roommates deteriorates. Their friends, and the activities they do, differ. "I haven't seen her too much," Camilla says. "We have different schedules. She goes out, like at 1 am and comes back at 5am. All she talks about are boys and she drinks a lot now. I'm really worried, but I don't know how to talk to her."

The Different Lifestyles of Students

Camilla hears someone fidget with the doorknob. Light streams in from the hallway. She looks at the alarm clock: 3:00 am. Mayra stumbles and collapses on to the bed. Camilla pulls the sheets over her head and goes back to sleep. After attending class and doing homework, she is tired and wants a full night's rest for Saturday. She needs to study all day. A few moments later, Camilla awakens to the sound of her roommate heaving and vomiting. Mayra's target, a target she misses, is a trashcan next to her bed.

As Camilla tells me the story, she unpacks her laptop. She wants to show me the order for a book she has yet to receive. She worries because the semester is already three weeks old. We sit, enjoying a perfect fall day in Southern California, at a table near a cafe.

"What did you do?" I ask.

Camilla, knowing what she is about to tell me will garner a reaction, flashes a devilish smile, "What do you mean, 'What did I do?' It was late. I was tired. I went back to sleep."

"You mean," I begin with an incredulous tone, "your roommate was vomiting in a trashcan, or somewhere close to the trashcan, and you went back to sleep?"

"Oh, come on, Randy," she says, "I asked her if she needed anything first."

"Yeah, and what did she say?"

"I think she said 'no', so I went back to bed. The beds are close together though, so I pulled my sheets over my head, just in case she threw up again."

The Purpose of College

I have always wanted to go to college. My sister, she went to college and it's like an example. She was like a role model for me. My mom always tell me I need to go to college because she didn't go to college and so she has experienced that, that, I don't know, hard circumstances that she hasn't been able to overcome because of the lack of education. So she's the one that tells me "just go to college and do something better." My aunt, she's the one that had high expectations. She has the idea that doctor is the best, and you're going to earn a lot of money. So she tells me that if I become a doctor I won't have to look for a job because supposedly they don't have to do that. She just says, "What's the point of going to school if you're not going to become someone?"

I want to do something for myself. And I want to be able to, you know, say "I have done something significant with myself." And, it's just, I feel like when I came here, pretty much, people have that stereotype of Hispanic people not being able to go to college, so I felt like going to college was going to be a way to prove to people who thought I wasn't going to be able to go to just break that stereotype and show everybody that I can do it. There's a reason why I'm so involved in extracurriculars. I believe my people, Hispanic people, need to have more influence, like we need to go to college. If you're Hispanic, people think you aren't going to college, like a lot of Hispanic people don't go to college. And actually, it's kind of true. Like from my graduating class, all the people who went to college, pretty much, they were all Asian people, white people, and really few Hispanic people.

Changing Relationships

I talk to my mom every day. I have a really good relationship with her. I tell her about everything. She knows about everything. But, the relationship has changed a lot. I don't see her anymore. We don't talk every day. Well, we do, but it's not like at home where I can still do homework and talk to her. I mean sometimes I feel, at night, like it's an obligation to call. Usually I call her at 7:00 am before I go to class because I feel like that's when I need to call

my mom, in the morning. I feel like because in the morning is the time when we sit down and have breakfast.

Money is one of the things I can't talk to my mom about. My mom works part time. And, ok, where she's working is really bad. I hate that place. Because they don't pay them on time, so they had like three paychecks owed. Even though she works she doesn't get the money. She gets it once in a while. I don't know how my mom does it. She just thinks I'm going to have a job to pay for college. I don't think she is as realistic. What if the profession I do doesn't give me enough money? And what if I don't have enough money? I worry about not being able to pay for my tuition, like what if I graduate and don't get a job soon. Or what if my job doesn't pay a lot and then most of my paycheck is going to go to tuition.

For the first time, I feel like we have differences and she isn't paying attention to me. I felt bad when we were doing the application. She couldn't help me. It was different with my sister. They were in El Salvador. She could help. One, she doesn't know the language. Two, she doesn't even know or understand what's going on. When I tried to explain the process she didn't understand. I think she is really proud about it and happy that I'm here. She's also kind of scared. She's really protective.

One day it was my midterm and I didn't call her and she was REALLY pissed! My phone died, so when I turned it on I received like 14 messages and some was like "Camilla, why you didn't call me?" I got voicemails and text messages from my aunt too. She was telling me—can you believe my aunt!?!—she say, "Camilla, you do something good and then you do it bad because you didn't call your mom." I was really mad because I feel like I was working hard and then she told me that I was like, kind of, that I was a bad daughter because of that. I mean, come on! It was just a call on just one day. But they were making it like a huge, a big deal.

Navigating Language and Identity

For a moment, I felt like "Oh my God! I'm the only Latina AND WITH AN ACCENT." There are some Latinas on campus but they were born here. I just, sometimes I feel like, everything would be easier if I was born here. But I don't regret that because, I don't know, I just feel like the experience that I have in El Salvador was really great, maybe I wouldn't have had that experience here. It's something that I'm proud of: That I'm here, and I wasn't born here. But, sometimes I do get upset because sometimes I feel like it takes me longer to read something or I have to go to the dictionary because I don't understand a word.

This week was kind of hard for me. My English was more noticed this week. I spent a lot of time thinking about it. You know the psychology professor's study? He studies how smart people are and all of that and uses IQ tests. So, his quizzes are pretty much "Pronounce these words," which are my weak point. So they were doing this study and they were showing me the pictures and I had to tell them the word. Well I knew the picture but I couldn't think of the word. They just wouldn't come out. He was giving me hints. And I was like, "I know that. I'm not dumb!" It's just I don't know it in English, so that was frustrating.

I went to my psychology professor for office hours. She said I needed to go and since I was the last to finish my test she asked me that, that, how many years I've been here. I told her that I've been here three almost four years and she told me that she thought it was due to my English that I was the last one, so she recommended I go to the disability office, so I was kind of like it's nice that she's trying to help, but that kind of hurts. I cried when I talked to my mom that night. She said not to worry about it, but I was really sad. Whenever I take a test and I'm the last one to turn it in, it's not because I translate. It's just, I like to make sure it's right and I want to re-check the work. But, I didn't tell her anything. I just said "thank you." Then she said

I can come before everyone else to take tests. So that was nice. I'm going to take advantage of that [she laughs]. It's psychology, so I need it.

A Major Conflict

I'm so confused. I don't know what to do. I'm not sure if I want to do pre-med because my family has always told me to become a doctor, or if I want to do it because I really, because that's what I want to do. I feel like that's what everybody wanted me to do. Before I, I, I just thought about being a doctor and didn't have any other option, just that one. So I'm kind of afraid of going outside what…Does that make sense?

My mom came last weekend and I was telling her that I saw my advisor and I am taking three psychology classes. But I told her I wanted to become a psychologist and do like research and become a professor. And she told me, "Are you serious? Why are you doing that? You are going to die in the university and you're not going get any money. You're going be like one of those people who has a degree and doesn't work, like work in their career." I don't know. It feels like everything that is not becoming a doctor or medical school is not worth it. It just kind of, ahhh, it pissed me off.

We didn't talk long because I could tell it was going nowhere. I mean, I was trying to convince my mom, like make her see all the possible things I could do with psychology and she was like, she didn't believe me. I said I could have my clinic, work in a hospital, work in the city. I can do research; I can do a lot of stuff.

I told her that I was kind of mad that she didn't give me, I was expecting something like, "I support you. Do what is best for you." I mean, she told me that, but she didn't mean it. Why do you say this if you don't really mean it? And it's kind of hard because I care about what my mom says. I want her to be proud and feel secure. Because she's concerned about dying and me not having a future. It's a lot of pressure to get a career that will pay a lot of money when college costs a lot. And especially here. That's another reason why I thought, "Ok. Maybe I should do medicine." It's going to be easier to do a lot of money.

I'm so confused. They don't completely disapprove. They motivate me to do something with my life and to keep going. I told them that I wanted to take summer classes and they told me they'd pay, just tell them what I need. They are sacrificing. They are sacrificing themselves for me.

The Second Semester

A Major Decision. "I switched my major to pre-med. Don't say it. I know what you're thinking," she says during our first meeting after winter break. "My huge debate was the major. I was telling my mom and aunt about double majoring, and I was giving options and then my aunt was telling me 'What are you going to do with this?' That's why I changed my major."

"I'm surprised," I say, "You were so conflicted over all last semester. What happened?"

"Brainwashed," Camilla interjects before I can finish the sentence. She smiles for an instant and then becomes serious:

> It just kind of makes sense. I was looking at the description of every job and to become a psychologist it takes almost as long as med school and then you only make $40,000. My mom was telling me, "Ok, if you decide that—whatever you decide—don't change it again because you will end up not being anything in the end." I think she's right but that's a lot of pressure.

Work Management. The second semester is a few weeks old, and rain falls steadily. Classes just ended for the day, and the campus bustles with movement; undergraduates, some wearing rain boots, some carrying umbrellas, walk to their next destinations.

Camilla waits for me on the third floor of the library. As I look at her bulky biology book, she says, "I have a test next week. I am worried. It's only a chapter, but it's hard." In two weeks, she learns her grade on the test. It is a D. The class mean is 63; this fact, however, does nothing to assuage her worry.

She wants me to review with her an assignment—to explicate a student selected passage from Othello— for drama class. "Our bodies are our gardens," she reads, "to the which our wills are gardeners." She explains Iago's extended metaphor, but gets frustrated: "I even read the summaries on SparkNotes. This is hard, and it takes forever. I told one of my friends about the class and she said 'That's the hardest one. You should have taken Intro to Fiction.' I still have to study for Biology." She frowns and, for the second time since I've known her, says a cuss word: "I'm pissed!"

She stares out the window for a while and then talks:

> I'm getting really paranoid—I think about a lot of stuff. I think I'm getting a disorder—about missing something, like am I on the right time? Am I going to miss a class? Do I have my homework? What do I need to do? Did I do everything right? And remember my portfolio? It was my final and 60% of my grade. I was walking to statistics office hours, when I saw someone from English. She was hurrying because it was 2:30 and she said, "Oh, I'm going to drop off my portfolio." And I asked her, "Why are you dropping that off now? Isn't it due tomorrow?" She said, "No. Camilla, it's due today." I forgot that it was due at 3:00. I run to my dorm and put everything in the folder, and I didn't even finish the portfolio, like the essay was done but I needed to do some grammar. I even called the school where I worked to tell them I had the portfolio due and wouldn't be able to come in. And I took for the first time in my life the bicycle because it was all the way across campus. And I was really sweaty and I cried after I turned it in. If I didn't turn it in, I would have an F. I cannot believe I did that. Can you imagine if I didn't turn that in? I would have failed and my GPA would be screwed and I'd have to take that class again.

Because of Camilla's mistake, she received an A-, not an A, in English.

Interpreting the Transition to College

I now segue to a discussion of the third and final findings section, "Transitioning to College." As I conclude, to make sense of all of the data, I also interweave discussions of findings as a whole. Camilla's life history reveals the dynamic interplay between social capital and cultural identity across contexts. Her first-year experiences augmented understandings of herself. She navigated diverse social settings, all the while, asking, "How do I fit in?" In contrast to students at her underperforming high school, she enjoyed the more academic college setting, surrounded by high-achieving students and professors. At the beginning of the year, she eagerly spoke of her roommate; she enjoyed having a Latina roommate. As the year progressed, she formed new social groups and avoided her roommate, who focused more on partying and less on studying.

The changing nature of social capital also illustrated the ways in which it required maintenance (Portes, 1998). Her experiences with friends demonstrated the importance of the investment in friendship and the expectation of reciprocal exchange. Increased demands from

friends and school meant decreased time with family. Her mother, in particular, struggled with changing dynamics, indicating the importance of both communication and presence in relation to social capital maintenance. Her past continued to influence her college experiences. As presented in "The Purpose of College," she expressed a desire to refute stereotypes. Demonstrating the influence of bonding capital, she made a concerted effort to participate in clubs that reinforced her Latina identity and supported Latinos in the community.

Camilla's story reveals an individual who benefited from her family's resources but struggled to reconcile old and new identities. Portes (1998) highlights the unspecified obligations that sometimes arise during the exchange process. For instance, familism—defined as "a social pattern whereby individual interests, decisions, and actions are conditioned by a network of relatives thought in many ways to take priority over the individual" (Desmond & López Turley, 2009, p. 314)—caused conflict as she navigated personal and familial interests. Her aunt, mother, and sister sacrificed in order to live in the United States. Despite having trouble paying rent, both her sister and mother worked to support Camilla's education. The importance of schooling was clear. Not only did Camilla feel obligated to repay their sacrifices, she also had frequent conflicts when her own aspirations and expectations contradicted those of her family. And yet, her family, and the resources that exist across those connections, compelled her to succeed.

Social capital illustrates both the promise and peril of education as a means to social mobility. As Portes (1998) notes, the theory "calls attention to how such nonmonetary forms can be important sources of power and influence" (p. 2). Social capital builds trust among group members and facilitates the exchange of resources (Putnam, 2000). It reinforces or expands cultural identities.

Considering college access and readiness, non-dominant social capital is critical for low-income, first-generation immigrants (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Social capital also focuses attention on the varied networks that exist within educational institutions—and connect to other networks—and emphasizes the importance of institutional agents like teachers and college counselors (McDonough, 1997, 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Camilla adeptly accessed multiple sources of social capital—dominant and non-dominant—that supported college access and readiness. She worked with teachers and mentors to complete applications. She participated in extracurricular clubs that focused on outreach for Latinos in Los Angeles. And, she received numerous resources from her family, a close, tightly knit group.

Schools have the ability to reproduce inequities by denying students access to networks—or denying them access to the skills necessary to access and navigate networks—that provide social capital necessary for academic success (Fernández-Kelly, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In her study of Salvadorans in San Francisco, for example, Menjívar (2000) notes the difficulty of first-generation immigrants to access dominant forms of social capital: "[they] often find themselves unable to reciprocate favors or cut off from access to resources, effectively diminishing their opportunities to help one another. In this case the potential benefits commonly associated with social capital many not be available" (p. 149).

For some, Camilla may represent a Horatio Alger-type figure; someone who, despite all odds, succeeds. I caution against such an argument, which undermines the significance of barriers to education and social mobility for low-income immigrant students. Camilla is certainly an exceptional young woman. However, her story illustrates the massive cultural and structural inequities that students encounter. As a first-generation immigrant, Camilla routinely experienced the pernicious effects of stereotypes. In high school, a counselor placed Camilla in a basic course—rather than the requested Advanced Placement course—because of her accent. In college, a professor offered to provide more time during tests as a result of her "disability," another reference to Camilla's accent. College access scholarship highlights the importance of institutional agents such as teachers and counselors to provide resources to

students. The subsequent examples emphasize the potential negative effects of social capital, even when a student accesses dominant networks. That is, Camilla sought aid; however, the counselor and professor acted inappropriately and provided unhelpful, and potentially inimical, resources.

Using a Life History to Inform Public Policy

Life histories serve an important, and yet underutilized, role in the policy process. Through personal experiences, they have the ability to provide context and to compel people to action, to incite change (Clemens & Tierney, forthcoming; Datnow, 2006). The experiences of individuals—even when they are the intended recipients of reform decisions—rarely inform policy designs. College access and readiness has become an important part of education reform discussions. The reforms are particularly pertinent for Latino students, considering they are fastest increasing ethnic group. While this paper focuses on an individual, Camilla's story reveals complex social processes and federal policies that reify inequity.

The paper illustrates both the barriers and pathways to success for Camilla, a low-income, first-generation student. As a counter narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2006), the life history challenges extant scholarship that too often portrays low-income and racial and ethnic minority students in terms of deficits (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Suad Nasir & Hand, 2006). The diversity of findings highlight the need to better understand how social capital contributes to or alleviates inequality among low-income and first generation students (Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998).

The findings also demonstrate the importance of designing comprehensive reforms to account for uneven access to dominant social capital in low-income neighborhoods and to leverage non-dominant social capital. College access reforms like mentoring and bridge programs provide valuable interventions. Professional development for educators and culturally sustaining curriculum for students contribute. Larger social, political, and economic forces, however, undermine the effectiveness of such reforms. Camilla benefitted from the aid of resource brokers; nevertheless, access to them was a product of her own determination, not the logical distribution of opportunity. As the experiences of Camilla's sister demonstrate, inequitable policies limited her ability to obtain employment, despite having attended college in El Salvador. As her mother's inability to help during the college application process shows, high schools fail to involve immigrant parents. Rather than focusing on what immigrant students and families lack, policymakers ought to focus more on how to provide systematic, equitable, and inclusive opportunities for all.

Narrative research often humanizes the people involved and, to the extent possible, portrays the depth and dynamism of life. Consider anecdotes about Camilla's superstitious grandmother or her inebriated roommate. Camilla's story evidences the importance of social capital, the major theme of the text. It also reveals a humorous and playful young adult. A multi-dimensional representation contests the often too tidy and stereotypical portraits of first-generation immigrants depicted in research and policy discourses. Even more, life histories recognize the research process and presentation as co-constructed. Although policy scholars regularly suggest research as a product separate from the researcher, knowledge occurs in context. Failure to acknowledge personal involvement—and associated factors like researcher subjectivity and positionality—possibly hinders the goal of developing socially just policy. As discussed in the limitations, my social position influenced all aspects of the research process. Considering the effects of the study, my interactions with Camilla have informed my research and policy work, specifically how I design studies and interact with young men and women. Yes, social scientists must assume dispassionate and critical perspectives when conducting research. We must also recognize the role of compassion for and collaboration with study

populations when deliberating complex and subjective ideals like the successful design and implementation of socially just public policy.

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Appendix

Appendix. Sample Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Interview location: _____

Interview length: _____

Themes: High school, friends, and family

Introductory script: *Hi Camilla, since this is our first formal interview, I want to review the consent form you signed [go through form]. Do you have any questions?*

Is it ok if I start recording?

I'm going to ask some simple questions. Today, we're going to focus on your time in high school. You don't have to answer if you don't want to, but your answers will help give me a sense of you and your experiences. Remember: All answers are confidential and anonymous. Before I start, do you have any other questions?

Questions

(1) How would you describe Madison High School to a complete stranger?
   a. [*Probe: Friends / teachers / coaches*]
   b. [*Probe: Classes and after-school activities*]

(2) I don't know much about education in El Salvador. Could you explain the differences between your experiences in school there versus here?

(3) I want to change focus a little bit. I imagine there was a big difference between your life in El Salvador and the United States. Tell me about where you lived.
   a. What was the neighborhood like?
   b. What was your house like?
   c. Tell me one great memory you have from living in that house.

(4) Describe the neighborhood around Madison.
   a. What is your apartment like?
   b. Pretend you're giving me a tour of the apartment. Walk me through each room.

(5) Describe your mom.
   a. [*Probe: Education / job / relationship*]

(6) Describe your sister.
   a. [*Probe: Education / job / relationship*]

(7) Describe your aunt.
   a. [*Probe: Education / job / relationship*]

(8) Ok. We're at the end of my questions for today. Is there anything you want to add? In other words, what didn't I ask that I should have? What should I know that I don't?

Author Note

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