A Qualitative Study of Urban Hispanic Youth in an After-School Program: Career, Cultural, and Educational Development

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Abstract
Based on a diverse sample of 11 urban Hispanic youth, the career, educational, and cultural domains of developmental adjustment were investigated through a triangulation of interview data and field notes within the context of delivering an after-school program. Consensual qualitative research (CQR) and content analysis were used to explore how youth constructed meaning within these domains and experienced their participation in the program. The CQR results yielded five domains of categories and subcategories, while four themes emerged from the analysis of field notes. By synthesizing this corpus of data, directions for future research and implications for practice are discussed.

Keywords
career development, Hispanic youth, vocational psychology, qualitative research

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Over the past decade, there has been a mounting concern among educators, advocates, public policy makers, and researchers across the social sciences that Hispanic youth in the United States face an array of barriers to high school graduation, enrollment in college, and economic mobility gained from high-skills, high-wage jobs of the 21st century (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Velez & Saenz, 2001). Among Hispanics ages 16 to 24, the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that 21% were high school dropouts in 2007 (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009). Among Hispanics ages 25 to 29, 12% were estimated to hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 31% of the general population, in March 2009 (Pew Hispanic Center). (The term Hispanic will be used in this article. The term Latino/a is often used interchangeably with Hispanic across the social sciences. We use Hispanic as a way to honor its usage by the local community and agency in which we conducted the study. We are sensitive to the fact that there is no universally accepted term to capture the diversity within this U.S. population.)

Despite their relatively high rates of school dropout and low rates of college enrollment, the vast majority (89%) of Hispanics report that a college education is important for success in life, while a large majority (77%) of Hispanic parents believe that their children should go to college (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Indeed, Hispanic youth are even more likely than the general population to endorse college as the road to success. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the biggest reason why only 48% of Hispanics plan to attain a college degree, even if they strongly value education and college, is due to financial pressures to support family (74%), followed by poor English (49%), dislike of school (42%), inability to afford school (40%), the belief that more education is not required for careers they desire (39%), and low grades (21%).

This brief statistical snapshot is disturbing and should serve as a call for all stakeholders to work together in preventing school dropout while promoting college, career, and workforce readiness.

In the field of career development, counseling professionals can play an integral role in helping improve the educational attainment and vocational development of urban youth through the school-to-work movement (Gysbers, 2002). The extant research focusing on Hispanic K-12 youth has solely relied, however, on cross-sectional designs that use quantitative methods (e.g., Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer, & Scanlan, 2006; E. H. McWhirter, Hackett, & Bandalos, 1998; E. H. McWhirter, Torres, Salgado, & Valdez, 2007; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007). While this body of research lends support to the relevance of particular theories and constructs, it has neglected to listen to the voices of Hispanic youth from their own
perspective. Even more limited than these studies are those of real-life career interventions targeting Hispanic youth (Rivera-Mosquera, Phillips, Castelino, Martin, & Dobran, 2007).

At this stage in the field’s knowledge base, very little is known about how Hispanic youth construct meaning through their own perceptions and based on their own experience, rather than through the principles of a theoretical model that favors or emphasizes certain types of constructs over others. Against this backdrop, it is difficult to develop new research questions and generate unexpected insight into the complexity of their experience without talking and listening to people who represent their community. In this vein, career development is construed as serving as only one life domain that is interconnected with other domains, rather than standing alone in isolation. The ongoing lack of qualitative research conducted in the field pertains to many other topics and populations. According to Stead et al. (in press), the overwhelming dominance of quantitative research has stunted the growth of pluralistic methods of inquiry and, in turn, limited the degree to which interventions that presumably emerge from such research can competently address the totality of needs and concerns of populations that are underrepresented in the literature. Given the paucity of qualitative research situated within the context of an intervention, we investigated the career, cultural, and educational development of Hispanic youth who were participating in an after-school program at a nonprofit organization. Another purpose of this study concerned how youth experienced the program—namely, how satisfied they were with the program. To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind in the field which not only asks Hispanic youth about career development based on their own experience, but also does so within the real-life context of an intervention. We propose that the current study can yield information about the holistic development of Hispanic youth, including ways in which their development can be positively facilitated, which is not accessible through other research designs and methods.

Following the tradition of ethnographies and case studies (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 2002), field notes were used to foster reflection on the process of being a participant-observer. Hence, the research team functioned as collaborators with program staff. By working with after-school programs, career counselors can assist agencies and schools with program development, delivery, training, and evaluation. Today, after-school programs are held increasingly accountable for improving the academic achievement of at-risk youth because of the lack of academic progress made during school hours. According to a meta-analysis of 73 after-school programs using control groups, Durlak and Weissberg (2007) concluded that they can lead to significant gains.
in grades, test scores, school engagement, behavioral adjustment, self-esteem, and other outcomes; compared to doing nothing, they found that after-school programs can result in 27% more youth with better grades and 37% more youth with higher achievement scores. This conclusion reflects a growing consensus in public policy that after-school programs should include academic improvement as a defining goal (Sheldon & Hopkins, 2007).

**Education, Psychology, and Career Development**

During adolescence, acculturation becomes increasingly salient for Hispanic and other minority youth (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). Research suggests that multiple variables associated with the acculturation process contribute to how Hispanic youth adjust to school (Portes, 1999). Overall, educational research has focused on how language use, bilingual education, parent expectations, parent involvement, and immigration status influence educational outcomes (e.g., Crosnoe, 2005; Padilla & Gonzalez, 2001). Qualitative research has convincingly portrayed how awareness of racism and school processes (e.g., teacher-student relationships, curriculum) constrain or facilitate academic motivation (e.g., Worthy, 2006).

It is well documented that Hispanic youth who experience various forms of prejudice within their schools may develop academic motivation through a sense of self-determination and/or identification with other minorities; conversely, they may react to such experiences by becoming oppositional to school as a result of feeling devalued or being taught in a way that is incongruent with their cultural characteristics (e.g., Conchas, 2001; Lopez, 2006). Based on critical Latino/a race theory, Rolon-Dow (2005) contends that Hispanic youth should examine the notion (or myth) of meritocracy by co-constructing a “counternarrative.” Drawing from a 2-year ethnography of 9 Puerto Rican students and 14 teachers, the author made a distinction between teachers who care but who are not aware of (or interested in) students’ backgrounds and “color(less)” caring that derives from an authentic dialogue about cultural differences. Valenzuela (1999) coined the derailment of such dialogue as _subtractive schooling_. As she put it, “U.S.-born youth I observed do not oppose education, nor are they uniformly hostile to the equation of education with upward mobility. What they reject is schooling—the content of their education and the way it is offered to them” (p. 19).

In the field of career development, considerable attention has been given to the role of acculturation and perceptions of barriers among Hispanic youth, but without systematic linkages made to educational or academic outcomes. So far, the results have been mixed, are difficult to compare, and remain
limited in their degree of generalizability to ethnic groups besides Mexican Americans (Navarro et al., 2007). In a study of Mexican American females, Flores and O’Brien (2002), for example, found that those who were more acculturated to the dominant (Anglo, White) culture tended to choose less prestigious and more traditional careers; however those who perceived more support from parents and anticipated fewer occupational barriers were more likely to choose prestigious careers. In another study of Mexican American high school students, Flores, Ojeda, Huang, Gee, and Lee (2006) found that Anglo-oriented acculturation and career decision-making self-efficacy did not contribute significant variance to their educational goals. Among a sample of Latino youth, Gushue (2006) observed that ethnic identity predicted career decision-making self-efficacy. With regard to perceptions of barriers, a couple of studies indicate that Mexican American youth are more likely to perceive occupational and/or post-secondary barriers than their White counterparts (E. H. McWhirter, 1997; E. H. McWhirter al., 2007). This is not surprising in light of recent statistics provided by the Pew Hispanic Center.

Summary
As our review indicates, the portrait of empirical findings on the career development of Hispanic youth is, while promising, vague and incomplete, yielding inconsistent results that are largely confined to youth of Mexican descent. Moreover, the extant research in both the career and noncareer literature has failed to systematically link variables within the career domain with variables in other domains of adjustment and well-being. Because of this mixed and fragmentary body of research, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions, especially in the absence of a clear and comprehensive theoretical framework that explicitly integrates culture-specific concepts into its underlying propositions. It is also too early to conclude how effective after-school programs are in serving Hispanic youth, especially for those who belong to low-income families with limited English proficiency. For these reasons, qualitative inquiry is a suitable approach to addressing the overarching purposes of this study, which could reveal new or unexpected findings pertinent to understanding this marginalized group (Morrow, 2007).

Setting and Context of Study
The after-school program is one of multiple programs that the non-profit organization, a community-based educational and social services agency, provides to K-12 students, families, and adult learners, the vast majority of
whom are Hispanic. The agency is open 5 days a week and runs its programs based on funds provided by grants, as well as contributions and fundraising. For the present study, the goals of the program are to enhance the career development, leadership (e.g., life skills, community service, character education), and socioemotional development of youth in middle school and high school. This program runs 2 days a week for about 2 hours each session. Because it is an after-school program, students voluntarily choose to participate; while students are able to attend 2 days per week for an entire academic school year, they do not necessarily attend for every session. Over the past several years, the program has served from 75 to 130 students per year; students come from local schools that consist of a significant proportion (40% to 70%) of Hispanics and a significant amount (32% to 50%) of limited English proficient (LEP) students. On any session, attendance may range from 10 to 30 youth. Sessions may schedule guest speakers from local businesses, organizations, cultural civic centers, colleges, and universities to present a variety of skills (e.g., managing a checking account, choosing a college major, writing a resume, computer skills). Aside from the program of interest, the agency provides mentoring, academic enrichment, and tutoring programs that occur during regular school hours at schools. Family engagement programs are also offered in partnership with schools. In addition to youth and family programming, adult education services are offered that address computer training, English language proficiency, and General Education Development (GED) test preparation.

In comparison to national rates, the school dropout rates of Hispanic youth in the local school district are estimated to be at an alarming 76%. Given the academic emergency and academic watch status of schools, the community’s need for after-school programs is urgent and overwhelming. For the school district as a whole, graduation rates have continued to remain at 61%. These disturbing conditions gave rise to a sweeping overhaul of the local system, resulting in schools being shut down or relocating, and other schools refocused or repurposed.

Like many small nonprofit organizations, the programs rely to some extent on volunteers in addition to full-time staff. In this context, the partnership established between the agency and the university-based counseling programs served mutual purposes; that is, after-school youth and program staff benefited from having help and collaboration from the research team, while the researchers benefited because it could provide services and empirically investigate questions. The full-time staff, who, at the time, were directing and delivering the after-school program, had requested assistance from the first author about how the curriculum and the approach to the services they
provided could be improved and augmented. In addition, they also wanted to gain a better understanding of how to improve student attendance in the program. Given that the first author had access to resources with his affiliated institution, the staff welcomed any support that could be provided as they sought to make continuous modifications to the program, which they believed could be informed by the current study. In terms of gathering “evidence” of how the program worked or how participants reacted to the program, staff had previously collected anecdotal data from youth who were considered “success stories.” This partnership emerged from an alliance with the agency that was built over a period of several years by the first author.

For the particular program the current study supported, the outcome of interest was not psychological or socially oriented, even though psychosocial objectives are viewed as central components to the program. Rather, recording program attendance is critical for securing the financial support necessary to run the program. While there is a desire to verify that the after-school programming works with respect to demonstrating psychosocial change, most funders have their own set of criteria for making decisions. Be that as it may, using a rigorous approach to program development and evaluation is a priority for the agency’s current strategic initiatives.

Given the external pressures to document that youth were attending, one of the incentives used to encourage attendance was by offering a small monetary reward for coming each day. Nonetheless, attendance rates vary. Some youth show up for every session, whereas others sporadically attend, or only come once or twice. It depends on a variety of factors that fall within and outside of the control of the agency. An underlying purpose of this study was therefore designed to explore factors that might be too subtle to notice from the observations of the staff. The results could help shed light on how to enhance the program’s effectiveness and maintain attendance rates. This task is consistent with Morrow’s (2007) stance concerning the “social validity” of qualitative inquiry: “The products of the research would directly benefit and be ‘owned’ by those whom we hope to empower and about whom we learn” (p. 228).

**Method**

**Qualitative Design**

The qualitative designs and methods of data analysis deemed most appropriate were a combination of PAR (participatory or social action research) and consensual qualitative research (CQR; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). According
to Hill et al. (2005), CQR incorporates elements from phenomenology, grounded theory, and comprehensive process analysis. Because the researchers acted as participant-observers and were engaged in trying to solve social problems that affect a community of at-risk youth, social action research stood as a natural fit considering its emphasis on reflexivity, relational process, and cultural immersion (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). Within this approach, CQR procedures classified the core ideas, themes, and codes that emerged from the data, yielding a degree of transferability while remaining faithful to the meaning captured in the voices. In terms of a continuum ranging from nonparticipation (spectator) to active participation (immersed in the everyday practices of the program), the research team fell toward the latter end. We provided services in concert with staff throughout the school year, while documenting our observations via field notes. According to Patton’s (2002) dimensions, we strove to maintain a balance of the “insider” versus “outsider” perspective, while keeping a broad focus to our observations.

Participants

The participants consisted of 11 Hispanic youth who also attended the after-school program. They were enrolled in urban middle schools and high schools within a large Midwestern city school district. The youth ranged in age from 14 to 18 (M = 16.27, SD = .55) and were distributed from 8th to 12th grade. Three of the participants were enrolled in the 8th grade. One of the 8th graders was enrolled in a private school; the rest attended public schools. Five of the participants were male, and six were female. The sample had a range of ethnicities. Most youth (six participants) identified their ethnicity as Puerto Rican. Three students identified as Honduran or Columbian. Two other students identified as Mexican and bi-ethnic (Columbian and Puerto Rican). One participant disclosed that she was pregnant during the interview. Two participants (one male, one female) indicated that they were engaged, while another participant disclosed that he was married.

Research Team

The research team consisted of graduate students in school counseling, mental health counseling, and counseling psychology; they were supervised by the first author or principal investigator (henceforth referred to as the PI), a male Asian American faculty member. During the first year, five researchers collected interview data and analyzed field notes; four of them collaborated with program staff. Four team members (two male, two female) identified as White. The fifth researcher was an African American woman. In the second
year of the study, three researchers analyzed interview data, all of whom were White. None of them were involved in the delivery of services or data collection during the first year. As such, the original five researchers did not provide services, collect data, or analyze data after the first year of the study.

All but one of the graduate students had experience working with school-aged youth and/or were involved in placement training at a K-12 school. They all expressed an interest in the purposes of the study and in learning more about the Hispanic population in an after-school setting. None of the graduate students, however, had prior professional or research experience with Hispanics.

**Procedures**

The research proposal was approved by the university’s human subjects review board. A purposeful sampling method was used; that is, only youth in the after-school program were recruited, the vast majority of whom were Hispanic from urban neighborhoods. Those who returned a signed informed consent from their parent(s)/legal guardian participated in the interviews; a couple of participants were of legal adult age to consent on their own behalf. The consent form was translated by a bilingual, Spanish-speaking doctoral student and teaching assistant in the Department of Spanish, and was then back-translated by a bilingual, Spanish-speaking employee who was a staff member at the agency. Upon analyzing the translated and back-translated versions, the PI found no significant discrepancies. This conclusion was then confirmed by a member of the research team. Both English and Spanish versions of the consent form were distributed to the youth in the program when recruiting participants.

About 50% of the youth who attended the program returned consent forms. The semi-structured interviews contained scripted questions with suggested probes for deeper exploration. Before participating, youth read and signed an assent form. The same procedures for translation were applied to the assent form. All participants were given a small snack after completing the interview; all had the option to be interviewed in Spanish by one of the program staff if that was their preference. No participant chose to be interviewed in Spanish. Because the participants had interacted with the research team for an extended period of time, a foundation of trust and familiarity had already been established between them and their interviewers.

**Reflexivity, Circularity, and Collaboration**

During the first year of the study, several research processes were occurring. First, the research team was getting acquainted and, over time, becoming comfortable interacting with the youth, staff, and familiarity of the program’s
structure and ways of being implemented. Second, they were steadily increasing their level of direct involvement, which came with more familiarity and trust established. The level and rate of participation varied for individuals based on a host of factors, such as previous experience working with youth and development as a counselor. The PI held biweekly group supervision meetings, as well as weekly individual supervision on an as-needed basis, to debrief and help provide a safe space for the research team to respectfully and openly discuss concerns, questions, and observations. The program’s coordinator also participated in these sessions once a month.

A third process that was taking place was the writing of weekly field notes and the development of an interview protocol. Researchers were trained in how to write a field note by the PI and read pertinent literature (Patton, 2002). These field notes were submitted to the PI by each researcher following participation in a session. During supervision, field notes would be used, in part, as a basis for group discussion, eliciting impressions that would sometimes differ in terms of one’s interpretations. These inconsistencies helped facilitate a self-reflexive process of considering personal and cultural biases in the context of group feedback and support. It also served as material for the PI and researchers to provide peers with suggestions about how people could modify what they were doing in the program or consider trying something different for next time.

By the end of the school year, each research team member had provided at least one class activity and contributed to the development and delivery of a lesson. The research team had also contributed to working with the staff in refining pedagogical approaches, such as incorporating cooperative learning exercises. Toward the end of the first semester, the research team and program coordinator had agreed on implementing new types of strategies (e.g., small groups, games) for making the curriculum and process of learning for the youth more engaging.

During the second year of the study, analysis of the interview data, which was collected during the second semester of the previous school year, consumed most of the research process. The three new researchers were trained by the PI on CQR and read pertinent literature (Hill et al., 1997). They openly discussed their biases about what they expected to find, reflecting on their personal background and experiences in school. For example, one team member discussed her anticipation of not discovering any career goals that could be articulated by youth in middle school, whereas another member was doubtful about finding any goals that could be realistically expressed by a senior in high school. Collectively, the researchers voiced mixed views about whether culture would “matter” in terms of what the youth might describe.
Before analyzing transcribed data, the research team practiced CQR coding procedures with fictitious data and went over the process together in terms of reaching a consensus. While all of the researchers were interested in the subject matter and valued the role of career education, they varied in terms of their incoming knowledge of the relevant academic literature.

**Measures**

The semi-structured interview was designed to explore each major domain of development: career, educational, and cultural. The questions developed were informed by our review of the relevant literature and were therefore designed to investigate phenomena at a comprehensive level. The protocol allowed for leeway in probing youth for a more in-depth account of their experience. Interviewees were asked all of the open-ended questions listed on the protocol (see the appendix). This level of consistency helped serve to reduce idiosyncratic effects of the interviewers (Hill et al., 2005). Several versions of the protocol were produced until it was determined that the questions fit the intended domain. It should be noted that one question asked youth to rate how important school was to them (10 being the highest, 1 being the lowest). In this respect, it was a closed-ended question that was specifically quantifiable in terms of the rating that was reported.

**Data Analyses and Trustworthiness**

After all of the interviews were transcribed, they were analyzed following the CQR method. In this phase of the study, the three aforementioned research members had been trained in CQR. They each conducted an independent analysis of the data using a constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), breaking it down into domains, or broad constructs related to the content, followed by the construction of core ideas within each domain, and completed by a cross-analysis, or the identification of categories and subcategories across cases that captured the essence of the core ideas. Afterward, the research team met to discuss and modify the set of domains, core ideas, and categories until consensus was achieved.

The PI met with the research team toward the end of several meetings to facilitate “peer debriefing,” as utilized in grounded theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This helped manage the subjectivity and research team biases by ensuring an open discussion of alternative ways of interpreting the data. Consistent with CQR, the PI audited all phases of the CQR process. An external auditor also checked the coding after all of the data had been cross-analyzed. This
The auditor was a graduate student and had been trained to use the CQR method by the PI; the external auditor searched for disconfirming evidence across all cases; afterward, the auditor provided feedback and recommended changes in terms of the accuracy of the codes and coding system. Specifically, the auditor suggested that certain words be renamed when trying to capture the essence of the codes, while also collapsing certain subcategories under categories. The main results were not significantly altered by these changes, but they did help organize the system of codes into a more meaningful framework that accurately depicted their relevance. In this study, only one external auditor was used. As a stability check, one case was withheld to determine if it fit into categories or altered the designations of general (applies to all cases), typical (at least half of the cases), and variant (apply to at least two cases, but less than half) frequency labels. The stability check did not affect the system of codes or alter the results of the cross-analysis.

Data Triangulation

In terms of field notes, these data were used to help facilitate the research team’s reflexivity for ongoing collaboration with staff. At the same time, it was also used as another source of data to be incorporated into the overall system of codes yielded by the interviews, so as to enrich, expand, or even contradict the meanings of those codes. A content analysis (or thematic analysis) was employed to identify themes that emerged from the field notes (Patton, 2002). At the midpoint of the school year, the research team analyzed field notes that accumulated as a narrative artifact of the participant-observation process. The procedures delineated by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) were used. The coding was subjected to the external auditor’s review for ensuring the reliability of field notes and to provide feedback. Field notes were recorded in a descriptive (what people do and say) and reflective (what the observer thinks, feels, intuits) manner.

Results

As shown in Table 1, CQR analysis yielded five domains. Due to the odd number of cases (11), we decided to use five cases as the minimum frequency needed in order for a domain, category, or subcategory to be classified as typical. Based on Kenny et al. (2007), we also included a “rare” designation in the cross-analysis for categories/subcategories that had only one case. The first domain, education, referred to any response related to school or academic behavior. The second domain, visions of the future, referred to a projected end
Table 1. Categories and Subcategories Organized by Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Category/Subcategory</th>
<th>Frequency Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-secondary</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good grades</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic survival</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family influence</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic help</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No role</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer influence</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No role</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic help</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visions of Future</strong></td>
<td>Young adulthood</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vague</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career-specific</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Projected work role</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career-specific</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Character-based</td>
<td>Typical</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feared selves</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistent</td>
<td>Rare</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identification with school</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities, global</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities, specific</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Influences</strong></td>
<td>Bilingual as normal asset</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not bilingual</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diffuse</td>
<td>Typical</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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(continued)
state with regard to developmental periods of life and career development. The third domain, cultural influence, pertained to any response related to language use, ethnic identity, and acculturation. The fourth domain, current priorities, pertained to perceptions of what is important or valued in everyday life. Finally, the fifth domain, program satisfaction, consisted of perceptions of being helped by the program and the agency in general.

**Education: Domain 1**

*Goals.* Educational goals were general and were coded when youth reported a goal they had in school. The first subcategory, post-secondary, was typical, referring to goals that required more than a high school diploma, which often meant going to attain a college education. As a male, 17-year-old Puerto Rican senior described, “I want to go to Tri-C [Cuyahoga Community College], take my grades, and pass to Cleveland State to get my bachelor degree and my master degree” (Participant 10). The second subcategory, high school diploma, was variant, referring to goals that went only as far as graduating from high school and no further education. As a male, 17 year-old bi-ethnic (Columbian and Puerto Rican) sophomore explained, “Get a high school diploma or GED or just get a high school diploma. Do good on your OGTs [Ohio Graduation Test] or whatever so you can pass and get out. That’s mainly my goals” (Participant 1). The third subcategory, get good grades, was rare and referred to Participant 3, a 14-year-old Puerto Rican female in the eighth grade, regarding her goal of performing well academically in the here-and-now. As she put it, “Keep A’s.” The fourth subcategory, economic survival, was also rare. In this case, Participant 4, an 18-year-old Puerto Rican male high school freshman,
did not report an educational goal; in response to the question tapping education, he focused on life stressors and finding employment as his goal. The following exchange captures this category:

\[P\]: Well, I really wanted to study to be a veterinarian but it’s just the way I see things. I’m just going to put myself to work and let my fiancé study because she really wants to.

\[I\]: How do you see things, I mean . . .

\[P\]: I see things real bad. There aren’t that much jobs, things are going way too high. Like now, I’m getting kicked out of my house if I don’t get a job, quick.

\[I\]: Yeah, and when you say that, is it just because of where you’re living or just because of the way the economy is?

\[P\]: Economy because I can’t pay the bills and I’m really behind.

In this excerpt, the interviewee does not seem to be so concerned with his educational goals as he is with not having a place to live and not being able to support the family at home. The theme of being burdened with constant, pressing life stressors and present-day concerns around “working” were repeatedly expressed. As he would later discuss in the interview:

\[I\]: So you were pretty much absent from a lot of school [when living in Puerto Rico]?

\[P\]: Yeah, because instead of going to school I would just go to work. Finding any way to make money . . . [reflecting on his life growing up in Puerto Rico]. . . . Sometimes I wake up at 5 in the morning to catch, uh, there was this person that passed by the, down by the city, over there, in a jeep.

\[I\]: Mm-hm . . .

\[P\]: He’ll take you all the way up to his farm and you’ll just pick coffee for him. I used to go over there with him.

\[I\]: And then he’d just take you back?

\[P\]: Yeah, he’d take you right back at the end of the day. I used to make like $60 a day sometimes. Some days I’d only make like $20.

\textit{Family influence}. The role of family in education was general and coded when youth described members of their family (parents, extended relatives, siblings) in relation to their education. The first subcategory, \textit{encouragement}, was typical, referring to family providing emotional support for pursuing educational goals or succeeding in school. As one female,
16-year-old Puerto Rican freshman stated, “Uh, well they, they help me and they encourage me to keep going and not go back. No matter what happens to not go back” (Participant 5). The second subcategory, academic help, was variant, referring to family members who provided instrumental support for academic performance in school. One female, 14-year-old Honduran eighth grade student illustrated this concept by stating, “My mother is very bad at math so I don’t need my mother for homework I guess. My father is also not good at math, so I don’t bother. But my aunt who is also my godmother, my dad’s sister, I do call her a lot because she is a high school math teacher. So she is the person that I can call like help me” (Participant 2). The third subcategory, no role, was variant, referring to a lack of family involvement in school, or the perception that family members did not care about how they were doing in school. As a male, 18-year-old Puerto Rican freshman noted, “I don’t know. I do not know” (Participant 4). Or as a female 16-year-old Puerto Rican sophomore put it, “They don’t talk about it but my mom tells me to finish. Like yesterday for maybe the third time from last year. I don’t think she really cares anyways so” (Participant 7).

Peer influence. The role of peers and/or friends in education was typical and coded when youth described their peers, classmates, or friends in relation to their education. The first subcategory, no role, was variant and referred to a lack of peer involvement in school or education. A male, 17-year-old Honduran junior illustrated this concept when noting, “Uh, really they play no role in my goals. Because, uh, some of my classmate think I will not get there or I’m not going to succeed in life and all that so they do not play a part in my life or goals” (Participant 9). Of noteworthy observation is that all cases occurred only among males. As we can infer from the above quote, there was a degree of discouragement, or perhaps an underlying indifference, on the part of peers experienced by the student. This was observed in other cases as well. The second subcategory, encouragement, was variant, referring to responses describing peers as offering emotional support for school or educational goals. As Participant 5 describes:

Well, they’re like the same—they encourage me. Some of them don’t but most of them do. They just, they know that I’m pregnant and they say if I need help or anything just them know. And they tell me to go to school, get an education, since I’m going to be a mother that I’m going to need that.
The third subcategory, academic help, was variant. It captured the same concept that was coded under Family Influence. As illustrated by Participant 2, “My friends, yes, they do help me when they can.”

Ratings of the perceived importance of school. This was not a category. However, it does fall under the domain of education in terms of its underlying content. Interestingly, all of the participants rated the importance of school as ranging from high to extremely high. Seven students reported a 10, while two students reported a 9 and one reported a score of 8.

Visions of Future: Domain 2

Young adulthood. The vision of one’s life during young adulthood was general and was coded for any response that reflected youths’ capacity to project long-term outcomes after high school, that is, 5 to 10 years later. The first subcategory, vague, was typical, referring to a global or relatively undifferentiated view of where youth might be, what they might be doing, who they might be with, and so forth. This vagueness was characterized by mental pictures of being married, having kids, and having a job, but without any crystallized sense of direction. As illustrated in the words of Participant 11, “Um, being a professional, having my own career, um, yeah, being in probably the top ones helping, uh, kids with, uh, deficiencies like problem kids, um, health-related and having a house, probably married with a kid.” Similarly, Participant 1 stated, “Oh, probably have a wife and probably some kids. I don’t know. Probably, and a house. That’s where I see myself. Still in the military.” The second subcategory, career-specific, was variant, referring to visions of the future that were confined to the career role or primarily based on one’s career. Unlike vague visions, these cases had concrete information. As Participant 10 described, “In five years I see my life being a detective for the police or the swat team.” Or as one female, 14-year-old Puerto Rican freshman said, “I see myself in the air force. I want to become a pilot, but I also want to go to college. To study law and criminal investigation and forensics science” (Participant 6).

Projected work role. This particular category was general and involved any response related to future roles in the world of work. The first subcategory, character-based, was typical, referring to virtues or values that pertained to the kind of worker youth wanted to become, such as a leader. As Participant 2 described, “I’ll probably be the person that they come to like what can we do, we need a commercial, help me with this, the person they come to for creative ideas. Or the person they come to explain more.” Youth who talked about such characteristics also reported specific careers. The second subcategory,
career-specific, was therefore a general category, referring to careers/occupations that youth planned on choosing. For Participant 3, character attributes and specific occupations were revealed:

Um, if I try to become a nurse, then, because I know that they’re getting a lot of layoffs, if I’m lucky enough to actually get a job as a nurse, that they won’t, like, fire me, basically. And I will be able to help people, like, people who basically need help. Like if someone needs help doing something, I can be able to help them or someone else is busy then I’m going to be able to help them and do their job and just say, “Oh, not, it’s okay for me to do this, because you were busy over there so I just did your job.” Um, if I become a psychiatrist, I’ll just help the people. Help them with their problems really and try to help them solve it using a good choice, without using violence—which a lot of people do nowadays.

Still, others reported specific occupations or careers that they described as fantasies. Participant 11, for instance, reported that she wanted to become a special education teacher but also divulged dreams that she viewed more as a fantasy—becoming the first female president. The third subcategory, feared selves, was variant, referring to particular careers or occupations that youth described as being afraid of attaining, or desiring to avoid in the future, in great detail as motivation to make wise career decisions. As Participant 3 explained:

Um, this one is really weird to say, but as a drug dealer. That is a job for people who choose the bad choice, and yet I’m still on that road because I’m like, learning to choose, since I’m still young enough to do these kinds of things, I’m trying to choose which path is better than the other. Like, if I wasn’t here at [the agency] right now, I could probably be on the streets like, um, with some people I don’t even know, possibly selling drugs and that’s a bad thing because my mom and I watch movies about things like that and watch the news a lot, and in the movies, things happen to people, because you can also be at a place at the wrong time. And being a drug dealer is a dangerous job because if you owe somebody money that you’re supposed to pay them, you could possibly lose your life and not only someone wanting to kill you but you selling drugs might also want to tempt you to start using them and if you get addicted then you’ll probably die.
In contrast to the above feared self that was realistic, well-developed, and reflective, other youths’ feared selves seemed be the outgrowth of lacking information about the world of work, acquiring inaccurate information, or endorsing distorted beliefs about a career or occupation. As Participant 5 expressed in her worries of entering a medical profession, “I feel like if I become a nurse they’ll tell me to work, like, for example, they’ll pull me up a level and I’ll to work, like, in the operation room, or where they put the dead people are.”

The fourth subcategory, inconsistent, was a rare category. For Participant 4, he could not identify a career or cluster of occupations that had an underlying theme, set of interests, or set of values, skills, and preferences. Instead, he constructed his future role in the world of work in a seemingly random manner. As illustrated in the following dialogue:

\[ P: \text{I wish I was a lawyer.} \]
\[ I: \text{Wish you were a lawyer?} \]
\[ P: \text{The job I hope to have is work as a farmer, the owner of a farm, you know, and just help out, you know, with the workers.} \]
\[ I: \text{Okay.} \]
\[ P: \text{And the one I fear—probably working with Down’s Syndrome.} \]
\[ I: \text{Okay, okay. . . now, you said you wanted to be a veterinarian before . . .} \]
\[ P: \text{I wanted to, but I started thinking things and, you know, I really want to, you know, have my own farm and, you know, work it. Have a few animals in there.} \]
\[ I: \text{Yeah, good. Now, where did lawyer come from?} \]
\[ P: \text{Well, a friend of my uncle, from my mom’s side, well, too, from my dad’s side, you know, the way the work, I worked with them, helping people out.} \]

Here we can see that the young man, on one hand, wants to be a lawyer and, on the other hand, wants to own his farm. He also said at one point during the interview that he wanted to be a veterinarian, which was, coincidentally, the same occupation that his fiancé wanted to become. It was discovered later on in the interview that his interests in veterinary school sprung out of his affect-laden experience of helping a dog at an animal hospital working “under the table” that had been passed down from his grandmother: “It was the only thing I had from my grandma.”

**Identification with school.** The identification with school was typical and was coded for any response that indicated an investment in school because of
a belief in the payoff or benefits of getting an education. The first subcategory, *future opportunities (global)*, was typical and referred to a belief in the opportunity narrative, but at a relatively naive and superficial level. As one male, 18-year-old Columbian senior explained, “Education is very important because you can learn a lot for thing. If you don’t study, uh, you don’t have good work, you don’t get a lot of money. If you study and finish education you can get good work and more money and more help” (Participant 8). This concept did not seem to depend on any other occurrence of codes or discriminate some youth from others. Although the second subcategory, *future opportunities (specific)*, consists of the same content as the first, it captures a more sophisticated (hypothetical, multidimensional) understanding of the value of education through greater detail, realism, and reflection. This subcategory was variant. As Participant 2 noted:

> Education, it is very important but you could probably get around. Like let’s say, I studied six years, I studied two years. Maybe what you studied for you might not be able to get that job, so . . . I’ve seen people get by with an associate’s degree, only a high school degree . . . I’ve seen people get by with only that, but it is very important to try ‘cause you’ll probably do better. You’ll probably do okay with an associate’s or high school, but you’ll do better with a master’s.

The third subcategory, *irrelevant*, was a rare category and was coded for Participant 4’s experience only. According to this young man, school was extremely important, as he gave it a ranking of a 9. At the same time, however, he did not see the value or utility of getting a higher education or graduating from high school. As he put it, “Because what I’m doing to do, I don’t have to or need an education. Right now I’m like 3 years behind since I had to leave. I had to stop studying to help my mom. To help pay bills and stuff. But right now I’m working on it. I’m trying to get my GED.” In this context, it is important to note that he described himself as “working” since he was about the age of 12.

During the interview, Participant 4 mentioned working at a car wash and driving banana trucks in Puerto Rico, and then working for Time Warner in the United States for a little while installing cable, Internet, and cell phone services. He also indicated he and his fiancé were planning on moving back to Puerto Rico in a year and planned on living on a farm. In the meantime, he was coping with a variety of external pressures and stressful events: His stepfather’s children (three, to be exact) were about to move into his home in a few weeks, and his car had been repossessed by authorities. He was struggling to pay the bills for his mother and, as previously noted, was afraid that
he would get “kicked out of my house if I don’t get a job, quick.” He also disclosed that his biological father was currently in jail and still had another 9 years left on his sentence.

**Cultural Influences: Domain 3**

*Bilingual as normal asset.* The ability to communicate (speaking and listening) in both English and Spanish was typical. This category included any response involving bilingual usage as a developmental strength—namely, as an internal resource which could help other people in the community (e.g., peers, teachers, family) as well as one’s self in solving problems or adapting to various situations. For Participant 6, we see this captured in the following exchange:

*P:* It’s great. Got more opportunities because you speak two languages and there are a lot of people here who are Hispanic and they need somebody. For example, not that I’m going to work at McDonalds but at McDonalds they’re going to take somebody that speaks both languages because a lot of people are Hispanic and they need somebody to speak up.

*I:* Right, exactly. Does your mom and step-dad speak English?

*P:* My step-dad and my mom? My mom—she’s okay, eh, she’s learning.

*I:* When she goes out and about, what does she . . . does she speak English?

*P:* Uh, I’m always with her because of that. I’m always, when she has appointments or has to go out, I’m the one that always speaks because she can’t, but if she goes out alone and she needs something, she will make the words come out no matter just to get the words to understand what she’s saying.

*I:* So she can get by?

*P:* Yeah.

*I:* So you’re the family translator?

*P:* Yeah [laughing].

In contrast to the above dialogue, Participant 11 perceived her bilingual abilities as a normal asset, but also felt confused about how to use them across different social situations:

*I:* What languages do you speak?

*P:* Uh, only English and Spanish and next year hopefully Chinese.
I: Chinese, okay, alright, okay. So you talked about what it’s like to be bilingual in school. What about when you’re not in school?

P: Uh, it’s confusing ‘cause I’m between two languages so I could be talking with my friend and I switch language and they are like, “What are you talking about?”

I: Hmm . . .

P: So, like, oh, yeah, yeah, I have to remind myself that I have to speak a certain language when I’m with my friends or my parents cause at home they speak Spanish only and outside with my friends or school it’s English . . . so I get confused sometimes when you talk. Once I talk, I will be talking in English and then saying something in Spanish and then I’ll get it.

The above comments from Participant 11 seem to coincide with a field note regarding her behavior in a class that focused on using computers to work on resume skills. Although she can speak English and Spanish fluently and be a language broker, her ability to write in English may have been overlooked not just by staff and the research team, but perhaps by teachers in school.

She had many things to list in her volunteer and education awards sections of her resume, but she was struggling with what to include as jobs. This was my first experience with seeing her spell, and I was surprised at how many words she has trouble spelling, and when I would say the letters to help her she told me I was speaking too fast. I had made an assumption that --------- was more familiar or comfortable with the English language because I perceived her to be a high-achieving student at ------- [a private parochial school]. Seeing her type words for her resume made me wonder how well she really does in school and what sort of accommodations she might be receiving.

(April 3, 2009)

It is important to note that Participant 1 reported not being bilingual (i.e., a rare category of not bilingual). As he put it, “I don’t speak Spanish. I only understand it.” This anomaly seemed to coincide with his unusual history and background. During the interview, he disclosed that he was adopted; his foster dad was Columbian, and his foster mom was Puerto Rican. He was told by his adoptive parents that his biological parents were Puerto Rican.

Ethnic identity. The identification or psychological affiliation with one’s ethnic heritage, national origin, or cultural background was a general category and was coded for any response that indicated youths’ sense of self
based on what it meant to them (or did not mean to them) to be of a particular ethnic or cultural group member. The three subcategories were identified on the basis of Phinney’s (1989) model of adolescent ethnic identity: one of the most well-known and investigated models in psychology (Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Stracuzzi, & Saya, 2003). The first subcategory, diffuse, was typical, referring to a relative lack of awareness about one’s ethnicity or a lack of motivation in terms of exploring what it means to belong to an ethnic group at a deeper emotional and sociopolitical level of awareness. If one did recognize his or her ethnicity, the level of awareness was confined to knowledge of certain types of foods, music, customs, and the like. Moreover, it usually was associated with a “color-blind” attitude or the minimization of cultural and ethnic group membership and/or differences. As Participant 9 stated, “Uh, um, to me it’s [being from Honduras] not that special. It isn’t because a country . . . I see any country as like any other country. We are all Hispanics; we all speak Spanish no matter how different our Spanish is we all like originated from one place. It’s not that special because it is one country.” This superficial level of reflection can be illustrated in the experience of Participant 3:

I: So you say that everyone thinks that you look White, but you still get treated differently because you’re Hispanic? How does that make you feel?
P: It makes me feel bad in a way because, there’s this song that I listen to, it’s in a different language though, but it mentions that we’re all under the same sky, there’s nothing different between us. We all breathe, eat . . . we’re all humans. Like there’s nothing different about us, not even race can change us. And it makes me feel bad because of the way they treat, because we’re all, like, brothers and sisters, but some people don’t believe that.
I: And what are the ways that you either celebrate your ethnicity or you kind of feel differently than White people because of your Hispanic background?
P: Um, this is kind of difficult but I can answer it. Um, I really don’t know.
I: What about, like other than just knowing you’re Hispanic, how do you feel Hispanic?
P: Like, I know the answer, but I just don’t know it. You know what I’m saying? Um . . .
I: It’s hard to explain?
P: Yeah. . .
I: Okay, I think I remember. Okay, so does it mean anything extra special to be Puerto Rican?

P: Other than the fact that I can speak two different languages fluently—not really, because like I mentioned before, there’s nothing that really different between races. It’s just something that it’s in your background, but other than that, we’re all the same.

The second subcategory, *achieved/integrated*, was variant, referring to a clearly defined commitment to an ethnic or cultural identity, and a positively internalized sense of self based on that identification, implying a sense of pride, security, and cognitive flexibility. It is important to note here that all cases were females. Participant 2 illustrates this concept: Even though her father’s side of the family comes from France, Germany, and Canada, “I identify more myself to be Honduran because I am proud of that. But I am happy that my mom came here and all that stuff. Because being a U.S. citizen you have so many opportunities but that is why I have my passport: double nationality. I go so often to Honduras, that means I can go to Honduras for an entire year and I can come back here no problem and continue living here.” This level of developmental maturity is especially revealed through the following exchange, in which the same student talks about her sense of heritage, integrating various aspects of her life experience:

I: Your mom is Honduran, and did you live in Honduras?

P: Um hum . . . for awhile.

I: For awhile. Like how long?

P: I would always go in the summers, but permanently living it was fifth and sixth grade.

I: Fifth and sixth grade. Where were you before fifth and sixth grade?

P: I was in ---------.

I: Okay. Why did your mom move to Honduras?

P: She didn’t move, she sent me with my uncle and aunt. Which my uncle is also my godfather. And they sent me there because I always knew Spanish but they wanted me to improve my grammar in Spanish, and reading and all that stuff and to get to know the family and to know the culture.

I: That’s awesome. What did you learn about the culture down there?

P: Well I guess people expected me to react in a different way. And people when they saw me at first, “Oh, that’s the chick from the U.S. She’s conceited and all that.” And then they realized that I was not humble, but I wasn’t so superficial as people would think I was. And
I learned how to take on situations more and how to adapt, and not rely so much on material things.

I: How was the living conditions down there compared to up here?

P: Not the best because it was in a mountain. In a little village in a mountain. And if it would rain like a little bit, the power would go out. And the water would sometimes go out and you would have to get the water from the well which was sometimes very cold. And because it is so hot down there you feel even more cold. And the mosquitoes, and the dirt roads and all that things but happy. It wasn’t the best living conditions, but I could say that I was more happy there in the poor, in the poverty place, then here where a teenager can have anything they want.

As illustrated in the comments made by the 14-year-old female above, we can infer that this is a resilient young person who is beyond her years in terms of maturity, especially when we take into account various field notes recorded about her. Indeed, we can feel a deep sense of security in terms of where she comes from, where she has been, and how that has influenced her total sense of self. As one of the researchers recorded in a field note, “-------- is very open and honest with her opinions and she often participates in class. She is comfortable talking about social and political issues that are brought up in class, and appears to be one of the more liberal minded students in the group.” In another field note, the same researcher observed, “She is only in 8th grade, which I constantly need to remind myself because of how mature she acts. She is friends with many of the other students in the group, most of which are in high school.” While not as advanced as Participant 2, the words of Participant 6 are also evocative in terms of her ethnic identity:

P: I’m Puerto Rican. I’m not from America. I’m Puerto Rican. Uh, that’s where I was born. We may have grown up in the United States but we have our own everything. We have our own government, our own traditions, our own language, our own flag. We’re Puerto Rican.

I: Other than the flag and language, what do you think, what are the differences?

P: Uh, traditions. We celebrate everything differently. Um, we celebrate stuff that they don’t even celebrate here, you know? Uh . . .

I: Like what?

P: Here they celebrate sweet sixteens—that’s just one example: sweet sixteens. Over there we don’t do that. We do Quinceanera, which is
when you are 15 you become a senorita and we don’t do this huge party. We do this family thing where you change the girl’s shoes from flats to heels, which means that you are obviously becoming a woman. So it’s stuff like that, that make us different.

The third subcategory, preference for home/host country, emerged as variant and referred to a certain preference for living in one’s country of origin versus the United States. Participant 4, who was born in the United States but raised in Puerto Rico for most of his life, only recently returning to the United States, illustrated this category in the following excerpt:

P: I like Puerto Rico better.
I: What’s the reasons? I can guess, but . . .
P: Well, the beaches, the ladies, and the people over there, you know, they’re nice over there. If they see you, even if they don’t know you, they go up to you, talk to you . . . stuff like that.
I: You probably don’t get that around here.
P: Uh huh. Jobs are better over there too. You get them quicker.

In this example, the young man seems to have multiple reasons for his preference to live in Puerto Rico. Returning to Participant 6, a more complex and developmentally sophisticated construction of national preference is revealed in the following excerpt, as it weaves together her visions of the future, family relationships, career planning, and history of acculturation:

P: Um, five years, probably getting ready to get money to go to college. Ten years, wait, ten years, how old will I be? 24. Oh, I probably see myself getting out of college if I choose nursing, but if I become a, study psychiatries stuff, I will probably be in college. But if I’m graduated from college, probably getting things ready to go back to Honduras and stuff like that. Or, if I stay here, I imagine myself around age 24 probably getting married or something like that.
I: Do you wanna be here or Honduras? Or Florida?
P: Depends, no Florida, no, it depends how family is because if my grandfather is still here I’ll probably stay here, but if my grandfather is up in heaven I’ll probably go to Honduras. And it depends . . . jobs, if I’m able to get a good job in Honduras.
I: How is employment down there?
P: Where I was, probably not very well if you’re not going to be a teacher or work on a plantation. Then forget it. In the city, which I detest the city, you probably could get a job pretty well.
I: What do your relatives do down there? What is their source of income?
P: My grandfather owned a very big coffee plantation, and since he came here because of health issues my godfather now owns it. And we would do that. The coffee plantation, maintain it and everything.

Current Priorities: Domain 4

Workforce entry. This category was variant and was coded for any response indicating the desire to immediately enter the workforce after graduating from high school. This type of priority was only reported by males. In the words of Participant 1, “Get out of high school, get a high school diploma, and basically just go the military—basically.”

Family needs. This category was variant and was coded for any response indicating the primacy of the family’s needs, though it could coexist with other priorities. Consistent with the cultural value of familismo, Participant 6 explained in the following exchange:

P: Study, get good grades, help my mom, my nephew, and study a lot.
I: How do you help your mom?
P: Um, with the kids. You know, she has the daycare and sometimes she just goes crazy. So helping around the house, cooking, and cleaning, the kids, getting them ready, all stuff.
I: Yeah. What are your family’s priorities?
P: Well, the family I have here is basically my sister because most of our family over there back on the island [Puerto Rico], so, but, uh, our priorities are the same. Just, uh, take care of each other and study, and because my sister, she’s 18, she didn’t pass her OGTs [Ohio Graduation Test] so she still doesn’t have her diploma. She graduate . . . she technically graduated but . . .
I: Not officially.
P: Yeah. So we’re helping each other out so she can keep going to school with the baby. And, um, just knowing that she has somebody there.

Leisure and be well put together. These two separate categories were rare. For leisure, this category referred to activities pertaining to hobbies and relationships. As Participant 7 stated, “Music, playing my keyboard, fiance.” When asked about whether school was a priority in the interview, she replied, “Not right now, had, but it will be. . . .” In terms of the other rare category, Participant 2 seemed to express a more abstract priority of being well put together, so to speak. As she put it, “Right now, it’s really important to me to probably do what
my mother expects out of me, and to be able to organize everything life. Like try to get everything, not to pile things up and stress out so much. To organize myself mentally and to be a mentally organized person.”

**Program Satisfaction: Domain 5**

*Helpful (multidimensional).* This category was typical, referring to any response that indicated a perceived satisfaction with the after-school program and/or agency in general. In other words, responses that expressed a feeling of being helped across multiple domains and/or individual skills and family needs were coded for this category. It did not distinguish students by gender or other demographics and characteristics. As Participant 3 described in great detail:

*P:* It’s been very important, because like I said about that drug dealer thing. . . . Like, I could lie and say to my parents that I’m coming here but I could really be on the streets with somebody smoking or doing drugs with somebody else. A lot of people say that it keeps kids off the street from doing bad things and things like that. It keeps them safe because if me and some other students decide not to come to [the agency], we could be playing around in the streets, like not doing anything bad, just playing around in the streets. . . . Um, it’s actually another about [the agency], that I like about it is that programs like this, it eventually makes you think. It actually makes you think and it makes you realize, like, what you’re actually doing and it helps you learn more about the future—like college and stuff like that, money. It helps you get a job, and it’s just like a school but not really.

*I:* Good. How has [the agency] helped your family?

*P:* It lets my parents and sisters do things when I’m not around. Um, my mom because she really has problems with the computer. So it gives computer classes and my mom and my dad and sister actually learned a lot instead of asking me for help. That they can do stuff on their own and if they need help then they can come ask me. It’s giving them a place where they know I can meet other people and know that I’m going to be in safe hands. That I’m going to be able to learn a lot and it’s not a bad place and they can trust this place and know that I’m not going to be doing anything bad and that I’m actually going to be learning. And it’s for me. It’s for a good cause.
Helpful (area-specific). By comparison, this variant category was coded for any response indicating satisfaction with the program/agency, but only for a specific purpose (e.g., socializing with friends) or a specific domain (e.g., school/academics, managing finances). As illustrated by Participant 9, “Really important because they always help with either work I don’t understand at school, they help me look at colleges, and all that for me has been really important to me.”

Indifferent. This category was rare and was coded for a response indicating a sense of apathy. Participant 1 described his experience of the program as “not that important.” He reported how he did not learn anything or made any friends. In fact, the only reason he came was because of the small monetary incentive. Noteworthy was his description of his social life as, “I dunno, I stay by myself. I play Playstation a lot. I have nothing to do.” By sharp contrast, Participant 9 stated that the money was not a good idea: “For me what I really think is like what they should do is not offer money; like of course kids, some kids, will stop coming just because of the money. Why should we be get to get help when we really need help?”

Content Analysis of Field Notes

A thorough description of themes that emerged from the field notes is precluded by space limitations. Here, we provide a brief snapshot into recurrent themes that illuminate the various interpersonal processes observed and, in turn, enrich the codes obtained from the interview data. First, different types of relationships (Theme 1) were manifested. The most prominent style, referred to as vertical relationships, captured ongoing power struggles related to management and discipline of youth who were not behaving appropriately or were viewed as disruptive. Upper-level administration and staff would often bring up the issue of respect with youth who did not value the classes (e.g., not listening to staff, talking with peers during a presentation). This theme dovetailed with pedagogical style (Theme 2) and purpose for coming (Theme 3).

With regard to pedagogical style, two clear variations were manifested. Youth tended to be recipients of information through a lecture format or, conversely, were engaged learners who participated in small group discussion or individual mentoring and tutoring. In terms of purpose for coming, some youth primarily came for extrinsic reasons (that is, the small stipend), whereas others came for intrinsic reasons (e.g., fun, social atmosphere, value of learning new skills). For extrinsically motivated youth, it seemed that
they took the program less seriously and were therefore less engaged compared to other youth. When student conduct or behavioral concerns arose, staff reminded youth that maintaining a good image was important for securing the snacks and money for participation in the program. The intersections of these themes was complicated, however, by economic concerns with regard to funds for the agency’s operating budget, whether it had to do with potential loss of funds or the unavailability of funds. These outside pressures naturally created sources of anxiety for staff in terms of their employment; as a result, this may have exacerbated concerns regarding attendance, student conduct, and how classes were taught. Nonetheless, the inclinations for the researchers to put their counseling theory and skills into action were evident. At times, team members felt torn in the sense of wanting to explore the personal or socioemotional issues of youth in ways that, perhaps, extended beyond the main purpose of the program. This delicate tension is captured in the following excerpt:

My group consisted of “Marisa,” an older teen who appears to be bright, though somewhat distant at times; “Juan,” a boy in his mid-late teens who is sometimes moody and tries to show a “hard” exterior to the rest of the world. . . . Juan sat with his “hoodie” pulled over his head the whole time we were there. It seemed a persona he wanted to display today to me and the class. “Lillian,” a shy, quiet, and pleasant girl, who may have a crush on Juan by the deferential behavior displayed toward him; and finally, “Luis,” a friend of Lillian who was at [the agency] for the first time. . . . These four had never worked with me before, so the trust level was pretty low at the start, but by the end of the period, I was becoming aware that I was pulling too much out of them, touching on matters too intimate, and possibly painful, for the purpose of the exercise we were doing. I decided to pull back at that point and take some time to decompress and redirect the talk to a lighter level of disclosure. Some of the verbal and written disclosures were very interesting though. One was Juan’s statement, in relation to changing bad habits with family and friends: “I’m tired of being the bad ass all the time, having to act the tough guy in school. Sometimes I just want to be shy and gentle—not have to put up this front all the time. You know what; I need male role models in my life. I don’t have any. Everyone in the house is female, my mom, and my sisters. God, I’m the only male and I feel overwhelmed sometimes.” When asked about his father: “I don’t know where he is and I don’t care. He left
when I was just a kid. He doesn’t give a good f--- about me or my family and I don’t give a good f--- about him and I’d tell him that if he were here, right to his face.” (March 3, 2009)

During supervision, a constant theme that arose was the greater need for interaction-based learning (e.g., small groups, psycho-educational exercises) that may potentially enhance the desired outcomes of the program. As implied above, student interactions with the research team was another core theme discussed. Specifically, some team members felt that their ability to connect with certain youth, or feel as if they were on the same level of authority/credibility as the regular staff, were somewhat compromised (at least initially during the school year) because of their outsider status (Theme 4). This concern was not only tied to being viewed as a stranger coming from a university but was in part related to perceived differences in age, ethnicity, race, and native language usage, among other factors. In terms of delivering the program, the subtle and not so subtle meanings of relationships formed between youth, staff, and the research team are skillfully illustrated here. In this field note, being an outsider is particularly salient as it dovetails with the other themes:

Not only do the kids know who we are by name, but it also promotes the idea that we are part of the staff, rather than outside entities. Some of the students had fun with the name cards before the class started, saying our names out loud, asking us if we knew their names, “Carlos”: “Hey Jim, what’s my name?” “No, it’s not --------, it’s ------, no it’s really --------, but you say it in English like ---------.” . . . The focus of the class today was Part 2 of “How to write a resume.” . . . I’m always amazed at the flow of conversation between the students and how they effortlessly switch from English to Spanish and back to Spanish without any problem. It’s sometimes a little disconcerting to someone like myself, who is not bi-lingual, to try and follow the conversations. The kids do seem to be aware of this and make an effort to apologize and “fill in the blanks” for me and the other CSU assistants. (February 10, 2009)

In this illustrative example, one can draw a number of inferences. Chief among these is the concept of being an outsider based on language and cultural differences; but despite these differences, a sense of trust and connection between youth and research members is evidenced. The same researcher also recorded in a later field note after interviewing Participant 8:
He stated that, many times over the past months, he has wanted to ask me questions or ask for my help with some project or class assignment, but felt embarrassed because he feels his ability to speak English was so bad. He stated, “Jim I would ask those around me in Spanish to ask you the questions for me. I was afraid that you would think I was dumb because I couldn’t speak so good like you.”.

really wants to be a cop, a policeman and feels that the best way for that to happen is through the side door of knowing someone who is on the force. He says he understands that some college-level course will be required, plans to attend TRI-C [Cuyahoga Community College] with --------, another student who appears to be serious about attaining goals, but neither one seems to have a plan on how to make all this happen. He states that he knows he needs tutoring for high school graduation to happen this year, he wants it, but, as he put it, “I study so bad Jim, sometimes I only get Cs and Ds I know I need to do better but sometimes, I don’t know how. Sometimes I can’t read the English and I don’t want to ask.” At the end of the interview, -------- told me that he wished we could have talked like this a long time ago. (May 12, 2009)

As we can surmise here, the experience of being interviewed was, in itself, beneficial to strengthening the relationship between the student and the researcher.

**Discussion**

Collectively, the results offer a rich, multifaceted complexion of development and well-being, in which career issues are but one component of a much broader portrayal of the youths’ life experiences. While all youth rated education as important, there was considerable variation across categories and domains. Among the 11 participants, a “typical” profile was characterized by post-secondary goals, family encouragement to pursue such goals, and a belief in the long-term payoff of school. It was also marked by a vague vision of young adulthood, the formation of career interests and work-related values, and the perceived importance of completing school; moreover, youth typically viewed their bilingual skills as a resource but expressed a diffuse sense of ethnic/cultural identity. Most participants found the program to be helpful. In terms of revealing a future orientation and a basic connection between school and work, these results are consistent with Blustein et al.’s (2010) findings in a qualitative study of 32 diverse urban youth.
Less common characteristics among this sample were goals of stopping at a high school diploma, expressing a concrete, realistic understanding of the connections between school and the world of work, or an achieved ethnic identity. In these cases, youth might have endorsed workforce entry as their top priority, as well as supporting family needs. A “rare” profile was characterized by short-term goals of getting good grades or economic survival outside of school; one student saw the payoff of school as irrelevant. One student was not bilingual, and another placed hobbies and relationships as her top priority. One did not feel the program was helpful.

Overall, the results coincide with Yowell’s (2002) study of urban Mexican American youth. In her design, analysis of 30 interviews showed that participants endorsed a belief in the American Dream or a straightforward relationship between educational and economic success. These findings correspond with the frequent endorsement of global opportunities. By contrast, the few who articulated a specific identification with school were concurrently coded with an achieved ethnic identity. This linkage that emerged in the data may support Gushue’s (2006) notion that development in ethnic identity can facilitate career development for Hispanic youth. While an integrated, positively internalized ethnic identity may not be crucial for constructing post-secondary goals of entry into higher education, it may serve as an internal asset in helping equip Hispanic youth with a more complex and realistic mental roadmap toward reaching them.

With regard to other cultural influences, perhaps the most evocative finding pertained to language use, in which all but one student was bilingual. The youth constructed their bilingual skills as a normal asset, regardless of their ethnic identity or preference for home/host culture. As noted by Patel, Salahuddin, and O’Brien (2008), prior studies on Hispanic youth indicate a positive relationship between English language ability and career development. It is plausible that English proficiency forms an underlying cognitive basis for career development among English as a Second Language (ESL) populations. This premise was supported in a study of 265 Chinese immigrant youth, in which Ma and Yeh (2010) found that higher levels of self-reported English fluency predicted plans to go to college, career aspirations, and educational aspirations, whereas lower fluency in English predicted plans to work immediately after high school. Future research should continue to examine the extent to which English language proficiency contributes to vocational outcomes independently of, or in concert with, ethnic identity. Unger, Ritt-Olson, Wagner, Soto, and Beazconde-Garbanati’s (2007) analysis of different acculturation instruments among 221 Hispanic youth found that language-based measures
shared only small portions of variance with measures that assessed cultural customs, preferences, and identification. Thus, the authors argued that language is not a valid proxy measure of acculturation, which may confound the results of studies that only consider psychological or behavioral forms of acculturation.

For this sample, three students were 14 years old (all female). All of them evidenced profiles that were more sophisticated than the oldest students, who were 18 years of age (both male) in terms of ethnic identity. Our results suggest that different phases of adolescence (e.g., early, middle, late) may not be as salient as gender in terms of understanding individual differences along cultural lines of development. This distinction may be worthy of exploration in terms of understanding which subgroup of Hispanic youth (male versus female) is more motivated to seek after-school programming. When considering the recent trend observed by Castillo, Lopez-Arenas, and Saldivar (2010) regarding the fact that female Hispanic youth are now more likely to apply to college than their male counterparts, it would be interesting to investigate if such tendencies are mediated or moderated by differences in ethnic identity development.

One advantage of qualitative methods lies in illuminating the lived experience of rare or exceptional cases, which may lead to the development of new lines of inquiry. Specifically, the codes for Participants 1, 2, and 4 warrant further discussion. As already noted, Participant 1 was not bilingual; he was motivated to attend the program for the money and felt that the program was not helpful. The other male, Participant 4, was experiencing life stressors related to family, access to his car, paying the bills, and planning to return to Puerto Rico with his fiancé. Both of them shared a “work-bound” plan after high school. Even more striking was Participant 4’s belief that the value or payoff of school was irrelevant to his current and future needs in life. His concerns focused on economic survival and finding employment. By contrast, Participant 2 desired to “be well put together” and articulated in great detail her future visions and reasons for valuing school. She viewed herself as a future leader, whereas Participant 4 was inconsistent in his visions. Compared to Participant 1’s reasons for attending the program, Participant 2 was intrinsically motivated to attend.

Although the rare cases cannot be used to capture the overall experience of the sample, they do provide rich information that illustrates the potential utility for applying a psychology of working perspective (Blustein, 2006) to after-school programs for students who may not easily fit into the “go to college” message as being the only or the best route to success. The results raise the question of how to provide an after-school program to both “work-bound”
(i.e., those who plan to enter the labor market immediately after high school) and “college-bound” youth. According to self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), individuals vary in their motivation to engage in goal-directed behavior, ranging from intrinsic reasons (e.g., fun, interesting, challenging) to extrinsic reasons (e.g., rewards, punishment). Using a psychology of working, volitional or self-determined behavior toward achieving career goals can become self-regulating, even if reasons for engaging in such behavior are not intrinsic. For Participant 2, little intervention is needed to reinforce her desire to attend; Participant 1, however, would benefit from interventions designed to facilitate the process of internalizing reasons (e.g., beliefs, values, purpose) for attending. To increase his investment in the program, SDT would propose that his needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness should be met. Those needs must be supported vis-à-vis an environment of structure, respect, care, and genuine connections with others (e.g., staff, peers, mentors); by connections and “care,” we suggest the kind of learning and dialogue espoused by Valenzuela (1999) and Rolon-Dow (2005). In this vein, SDT would argue that he needs to experience a meaningful rationale for participating, have his perspective validated, and choose what activities in which he can participate. This depends on a flexible approach toward career preparation activities (Hoyt, 2001). Recently, Kenny, Walsh-Blair, Blustein, Bempechat, and Seltzer (2010) found empirical support for applying an SDT-based perspective to facilitating the vocational development among a diverse sample of urban youth, of which 37.3% identified as Hispanic/Latino; specifically, a full canonical correlation model showed that work hope, career planning, and autonomy support shared 37.5% of the variance with achievement-related beliefs (i.e., skepticism or optimism about the relevance of school for future success, mastery goal orientation, and academic efficacy). Consistent with the SDT principles of change, teacher autonomy support emerged as a strong and unique predictor of academic motivation.

Within the context of this study’s population, Hispanic males may be at a heightened risk for constraining their range of career choices. In this regard, work conceptualized as meeting needs of survival and power is more engaging and relevant than assumptions predicated on the notion that occupational choices are about person-environment fit (Chaves et al., 2004). All of these issues address pedagogical style, youths’ reasons for coming, and vertical relationships that revealed how the program was organized and delivered. For example, understanding what may have motivated Participants 1 and 4 to attend and participate in the program or what may further enhance their level of engagement in the program could be a useful avenue for future research and would also
directly benefit the program’s capabilities to recruit more youth who come with a variety of developmental characteristics and life circumstances.

In keeping with SDT and a psychology of working, it may be helpful to administer an assessment tool inside schools as a means for identifying students who may benefit from an approach to career preparation that corresponds with the work-bound profiles manifested in our study. More specifically, the What Is Work Assessment tool (WIWA; Chaves et al., 2004) fits with assessing how youth construct their perceptions of the future and society. If youths who may not be attracted to after-school programs are engaged in this manner, they could be encouraged to seek out a safe space where they gain support and guidance. This potential was illustrated through the field note concerning the male youth, Juan, who shared his story of being abandoned by his father. It is important to recognize, however, that while many issues arose regarding ways in which the program could be enhanced, the majority of the youth believed that the agency was helpful to them and/or their families.

The implications for research and practice discussed so far represent only some of the potential directions that counseling psychologists, career counselors, vocational psychologists, and other human service and education professionals could undertake. Indeed, it is likely that readers may glean a different set of questions, hypotheses, or considerations for practice that we did not necessarily observe or highlight within the rich information that this study has provided. In closing, we offer a number of suggestions for training that specifically pertains to the field of counseling psychology, under which career development and career counseling is subsumed.

Although the research assistants were not fulfilling a course requirement or expected to complete a research project for program credit, similar types of service learning, in which the process of research and community-based, preventative services are inextricably related, may be useful for training counseling psychologists in ways that have been recently advocated. Based on their review of accreditation history and a set of strategies for achieving greater institutional fit, Blustein, Goodyear, Perry, and Cypers (2005) suggested designing more formal mechanisms of research and practice-related involvement for doctoral trainees in K-12 disciplines and school-linked settings: “We believe by hearkening back to our core identity as a specialty rooted in education, social change, positive psychology, and prevention . . . we will be well positioned to adapt these attributes for the 21st century and to affirm further our place in a vibrant school of education” (p. 626). As the current study illustrates, creating and sustaining partnerships with educational organizations stands as a viable approach for leading to greater involvement. Research grounded in the delivery of youth interventions, whether it be
quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods research, provides a powerful vehicle for students to apply what they learn in class, while directly benefiting underserved populations under nonclinical conditions. To achieve this objective, though, faculty must be committed to conducting this type of research and lead by example for students (Stead et al., in press). As Blustein et al. (2005) went on to observe, “before moving into such affiliations and endeavors, however, we should consider how to first ask K-12 professionals about their needs and how we might help” (p. 628). This crucial advice underscores the PAR approach that the authors and research team chose to frame and guide their collaborative efforts with the agency. As previously noted, our study aimed just as much for “social validity” as it did for empirically investigating questions out of the sake of inquiry.

We recognize that this orientation to training is not widely adopted. Other examples of community-based partnerships and research are scant. Notable exceptions can be found in the distinctive approaches at Boston College (Goodman et al., 2004) and the University of Oregon (B. T. McWhirter & McWhirter, 2007). While a full description of their training is precluded here, it is important to point out that both programs have a broad and deep integration of interventions that are situated in nontraditional community settings as a means of anchoring the learning that occurs among students. For example, B. T. McWhirter and McWhirter (2007) describe a training component that captures the philosophical underpinnings of research subscribed to in our study:

One way that student relationships with the community are facilitated early on is via the community prevention and intervention course that students take their first year in the program. One course requirement that helps students integrate science with practice is for students to visit a local agency that engages in prevention work, to conduct an interview, and to write a paper and deliver a presentation detailing the mission and services of the agency. (p. 403)

As environmental interventions become more integrated into the balanced training of counseling psychologists, we hope this study can serve as an example of how research, training, and practice can mutually reinforce each other to the benefit of people in the community. Vera and Shin (2006) commented on this shift to environment-focused interventions by framing the issue in terms of reaching the clients who are in need of our expertise and services but may be least likely to be “treated” in traditional counseling settings: “The argument for prevention and outreach is simply that all the youth who need
help may not find professionals who can offer it unless we reach out to them and make ourselves more accessible” (p. 86). In the current study, students in both master’s-level and doctoral-level programs were able to expand their scope of training through research. An empirical question which remains, however, is the ways in which that experience equipped them with certain skills, competencies, or attitudes that they would not have otherwise acquired, become instilled with, or become more acutely aware of on a personal and professional level. Moreover, it is unclear to what extent such an experience influences the career decisions or shapes the occupational trajectories that students ultimately follow after they graduate. Several research assistants who participated in the first year of the study expressed a desire to continue to volunteer at the agency. One of them still continues to serve as a volunteer.

Several limitations of the study warrant observation. First, the results are partially a product of the interview. While we wanted to ask questions that covered multiple domains, this approach may have curtailed the extent to which richer data emerged in particular categories. For instance, the interview protocol was not designed to ask specific questions about career interests, skills, career decision-making, perceptions of barriers, career knowledge, and the like. Second, the interview did not inquire into perceptions and experiences in the socioemotional domain of development. Having more specific questions about their sense of self-esteem, self-concept, coping strategies, personality traits, and the like would have yielded richer data that could shape future directions in research and practice. Third and finally, the study is limited by the lack of member checking to verify from the participants the accuracy of the results and to enlist feedback or follow-up data. Although the version of the CQR method employed in the current study was rigorous, it did not adhere to all of its recommended procedures.

Despite these methodological shortcomings, the triangulation of data that emerged within the context of an intervention provides a powerful and rare glimpse into what Hispanic youth not only experience across multiple spheres of adjustment but how their career development can be facilitated in future implementations of an after-school program that will continue well beyond the period of the study. As we have attempted to demonstrate, the combination of PAR, CQR, interviews, and field notes was used for multiple purposes, all of which were united by the notion that research should strive to carry out a responsibility to listening to the voices of the people in the community that it is based and, by doing so, using the fruits of inquiry to directly benefit the stakeholders who participate in that process. While the agency still has considerable work to do before it will be in a position to maximize its impact and demonstrate program effectiveness, the process of collaboration
Appendix

1. Where do you see your life in 5 to 10 years?
   Probe: What do you imagine you will be doing?
   Probe: Tell me a little about yourself and what you want to do in the future.

2. What are your educational goals?
   Probe: How do you plan to meet those goals?
   Probe: What role does your family play in your goals?
   Probe: What role do your peers play in your goals?

3. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the best), how important is education to you? Why?

4. What are your current priorities in life? What are your family’s current priorities?

5. What is it like to be bilingual, both in school and outside of school?

6. How do you identify your ethnic, racial, or cultural background? What does it mean to you to be ________?

7. What role do you think you will play in the world of work?
   Probe: What kind of a job do you believe you will have?
   Probe: What kind of a job do you wish or hope to have?
   Probe: What kind of a job do you fear getting?

8. How important has [the agency] been for you? And in what ways?
   Probe: How has [the agency] helped your family?
   Probe: What is the most important thing about [the agency]?

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about yourself?

and feedback generated by this study has laid the essential groundwork for those future phases of growth to occur.

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