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Community Cultural Wealth in Latinx Applicants to Nationally Prestigious Awards

Susy Gomez
sgome056@fiu.edu

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COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH IN LATINX APPLICANTS TO

NATIONALLY PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Susy Gómez

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
      College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

This dissertation, written by Susy Gómez, and entitled Community Cultural Wealth in Latinx Applicants to Nationally Prestigious Awards, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

_____
Daniel Saunders

_____
Rebekah Schulze

_____
Rebecca Christ

_____
Benjamin Baez, Major Professor

Date of Defense: June 30, 2021

The dissertation of Susy Gómez is approved.

_____
Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

_____
Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. I would not be who I am today without their

example and the values they taught me. Their hard work and sacrifice provided me with

an excellent education, and their love and constant encouragement got me to this point. I

am incredibly thankful for their constant support, and though my father is no longer here

to see this day in person, I hope this makes them both proud!

I also dedicate this work to other first-generation students and students from minoritized

backgrounds who may not think they are good enough to succeed in higher education –

you are!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

constant support throughout my doctoral program, especially my fellow students who

were on this academic journey with me.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH IN LATINX APPLICANTS TO

NATIONALLY PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS

by

Susy Gómez

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Benjamin Baez, Major Professor

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Latinx applicants to nationally prestigious awards that have an international component. Students from minoritized backgrounds are underrepresented in these awards (Gerz-Escandon, 2017; Brownstein, 2001; Pinto-Alicea, 2001). While research suggests that Latinx students often lack the resources, backgrounds, or preparation to excel in higher education (Gándara, 2017; Salas, 2016; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) highlights less traditional types of capital that minority students bring to higher education.

Using narrative analysis, I examined the application stories of nine Latinx students who had applied to a prestigious award through Florida International University. After conducting two in-depth, semi-structured interviews, three major themes emerged. First, the family was central in my participants' application stories, influencing their aspirations, providing moral support, and inculcating values like self-improvement. Second, the participants also relied on other networks of support that provided both emotional and instrumental support in the application process, including mentors,

institutional award advisors, faculty, and even peers. Last, my participants drew on their cultural capital throughout the application process, which included highlighting how their language abilities, cross-cultural adaptability, and cultural identities made them competitive. These results are in line with Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth, which emphasizes familial and aspirational capital, social capital in the form of key networks of support, and linguistic, navigational, and resistant capital.

My research challenges the narrative that suggests that Latinx students lack the ability to be successful in higher education, and particularly in applying for prestigious awards. It provides different perspectives on community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) by focusing on different Latinx groups, as well as on the strengths that can promote achievement in Latinx students. This study helps institutional award advisors in promoting prestigious awards to Latinx students and in helping them navigate the application process. It also helps award organizations as they continue their diversity initiatives.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

As the population of Latinx students in the United States grows, it is important to support these students so that they can be successful in their academic careers (Gándara, 2017; Valdez & Lugg, 2010). Research on Latinx students suggest that Latinx students tend to come from underprivileged backgrounds and therefore lack the preparation and access to be successful in higher education (Salas, 2016; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). Nonetheless, Latinx students are not a homogenous group and have different experiences based on their country of origin, generational status in the United States, and even their geographic location (Torres, 2004), and this can lead to different educational experiences, as well. Still, students of Latinx and other minority backgrounds are underrepresented in applying for and ultimately receiving nationally prestigious awards (Gerz-Escandon, 2017; Brownstein, 2001; Pinto-Alicea, 2001), and the literature suggests that these students lack the resources, backgrounds, or confidence to apply for these prestigious awards.

As the organizations that award these prestigious scholarships seek to diversify their applicant pools and recipients (Gerz-Escandon, 2017), it is important to examine what motivates students, particularly diverse students like Latinx students, to apply and persist through the application processes for prestigious scholarships and fellowships. This study explored the application experiences of Latinx students from a critical perspective, looking at the counternarratives that Latinx students tell of the application process and how they view their cultural experiences as strengths. I was inspired by Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth, as this offers an alternative to

the deficit narrative often told of Latinx students. In addition to contributing to the limited research on prestigious awards, my study also looked at the experiences of Latinx students from various cultural backgrounds, allowing for more diverse perspectives on community cultural wealth but also on Latinx achievement in higher education overall. Finally, my study also offers important guidance for award advisors working with Latinx applicants.

Statement of the Research Problem

The student population in higher education is becoming increasingly diverse, and according to Valdez and Lugg (2010), Latinx students will be one quarter of all students in the coming years. Despite calls for diversity from fellowship advisors and the field overall, the applicant pools for nationally competitive awards tend to be somewhat homogeneous, and students from racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the applicants and recipients of nationally competitive awards (Gerz-Escandon, 2017; Brownstein, 2001; Pinto-Alicea, 2001). Research suggests that students from minoritized backgrounds have limited cultural and social capital to access and excel in higher education (Gándara, 2017; Trevino and DeFreitas, 2014), and though there is limited research on the topic, a high academic achievement like a nationally prestigious award is no different. However, most of what is published on prestigious awards is trade-focused advice for scholarship advisors (Gerz-Escandon, 2017; Simula, 2017; Bourque, Cotten, & Mentzer, 2015) rather than peer-reviewed research that explores the application experience and students' motivations for applying or not applying. Moreover, there is even less research in this area on students of underrepresented backgrounds such as Latinx students.

Nonetheless, research shows that students of minoritized backgrounds excel academically (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013; Geertz González, 2013). Therefore, models that explain academic achievement in Latinx and other minority students from a deficiency perspective fall short. My study was inspired by community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which critically explores the unique kinds of capital that students of color, especially Latinx students, bring to higher education. Community cultural wealth has been applied to recognize strengths in Latinx students in several areas of higher education (Espino, 2014; Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013; Ramírez, 2011), and it helped to highlight the strengths that Latinx students bring to nationally competitive scholarships. In addition, most of the available research on community cultural wealth and on Latinx students is on Mexican or Mexican American students, so the current research forecloses the experiences of the diverse group that comprises Latinx students.

Purpose of the Study

My study was heavily influenced by Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth to explore the less traditional types of capital that students of minoritized backgrounds bring to higher education and how these can promote achievement. In particular, I considered how Latinx students' experiences of applying for nationally competitive awards were influenced by less traditional types of capital encompassed in community cultural wealth. My research serves to fill a gap in the research by providing a critical look at these experiences and leveraging the strengths that underrepresented students already possess, rather than looking at their achievements from a deficiency perspective.

In order to explore the application experiences of Latinx applicants for nationally prestigious awards, I approached my research from a narrative analysis perspective so that I could better understand their application stories, especially in relation to culture. I interviewed nine Latinx students who had applied to different internationally focused competitive awards through Florida International University in Miami, which provided the perspectives of Latinx students from different country of origin backgrounds. I used two in-depth, semi-structured interviews to engage with my participants' narratives, which revealed their perceptions of the application experience, particularly in relation to their cultural backgrounds.

Research Questions

In order to understand how Latinx students experience community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in the application process for nationally prestigious awards, I explored the following questions:

1. How are Latinx students' experiences of applying to nationally prestigious awards shaped by different types of capital?

2. How do Latinx students view their cultural backgrounds in relation to their competitiveness as candidates for nationally prestigious awards?

3. What resources do Latinx students applying to nationally competitive awards describe as helpful during the application process?

Statement of Significance

My study is significant because it critically explored the often-overlooked strengths of underrepresented students, particularly Latinx students, in relation to nationally prestigious awards. Critical work has the goal of promoting equity and justice

(Guba & Lincoln, 2005), as well as positive change (Lather, 2006). In order to bring about change and diversify the group of students that receive nationally competitive awards, it is important to understand the experiences of underrepresented students in the decision to apply and in their persistence through the application process. Though increasing applicants and awardees of minoritized backgrounds to prestigious awards is not a major issue of social justice, my research began to break through the inequality and privilege that are reflected in current applicants and awardees by demonstrating that Latinx students have the drive, the qualifications, the support systems, and the cultural capital to be successful.

This research also has practical significance for both the organizations that grant prestigious awards and for advisors to applicants. My study illustrated the strengths that diverse candidates bring to these programs, further supporting the awards' diversity initiatives. My research also highlighted the gaps in awareness of programs like these among students of minoritized backgrounds, even high-achieving students, calling institutional award advisors to increase outreach to these groups and to leverage their support networks in the application process. In addition, applicants for nationally competitive awards may see themselves reflected in the words of my participants and see that it is feasible for students from similar backgrounds to compete for these awards.

Academically, my research contributes to the research on nationally competitive awards and expands the research on Latinx students and on community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). There is little peer reviewed research on prestigious awards, as most of the work in this area has been in practical writings for fellowships advisors (Gerz-Escandon, 2017; Simula, 2017; Bourque, Cotten, & Mentzer, 2015). Moreover, rather

than approaching this topic from a deficiency perspective, my research focused on the strengths that underrepresented students already possess that make them competitive applicants. Finally, most of the studies published on community cultural wealth focuses on Mexican or Mexican American students (Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013; Wick et al., 2019; Espino, 2014).), while my research included students of other Latinx backgrounds, providing an exploration of different cultural experiences.

Delimitations/Assumptions of Study

My study focused on Latinx applicants to nationally prestigious awards, particularly those with an international component. I did not look at students who applied for financial aid or scholarships to pursue regular undergraduate or graduate study at U.S. institutions. Instead, I explored the application process for awards that fund long-term research abroad or degree-seeking study abroad opportunities. In particular, I was most interested in students applying to the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, the Marshall Scholarship, and the Rhodes Scholarship, as these are among the oldest and most prestigious awards available to U.S. students. I also studied applicants to the Boren Scholarship, which focuses on national security and also funds long-term study in countries of critical national interest. In limiting my research to these awards, I understood that I may be foreclosing the potential differences in the experiences of applicants for these awards and applicants for other scholarships or awards. Nonetheless, my research was qualitative and exploratory in nature, and my results were not meant to be generalizable but rather to understand the experiences of these students.

In addition, my research focused on Latinx students. Students of racial and ethnic minorities overall are underrepresented in nationally prestigious award recipients (Gerz-

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Escandon, 2017; Brownstein, 2001; Pinto Alicea, 2001), and research exploring their experiences uncovered the unique strengths that they bring to the application process for these awards. However, my study looked only at Latinx students at Florida International University who had applied to these awards. Miami is diverse and has a Latinx population that is more heterogenous than other parts of the United States (Motel & Patten, 2012), and the lived experiences of different Latinx groups has an impact on how they experience higher education (Torres, 2004). Moreover, geographic location also has implications for how Latinos identify (Price, 2010) and experience racism (Frank et al., 2010). As a result, my findings differed from other work on community cultural wealth that has focused mostly on Mexican American students (Wick et al., 2019; Espino, 2014; Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013) and from other research on Latinx students in general.

Moreover, there were several assumptions implicit in my study. In exploring community cultural wealth in my participants, I assumed that they possess and recognize the types of capital that make up community cultural wealth as a result of their cultural background. However, Latinx students have different levels of identification with their ethnic backgrounds based on how they were raised and how many generations their family has lived in the United States (Torres, 2004). My study's qualitative design also had certain assumptions. For instance, I used interviews to capture the experiences of my participants, but by doing so I assumed that they are accurately remembering and portraying their experiences in those interviews (Yin, 2009, as cited in Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). By using narrative analysis to analyze the data captured in these interviews, I also operated under the assumption that I accurately depicted their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). According to Connelly and Clandinin, using

peer checks can help increase accuracy, and I conducted a second interview with each participant to review and co-create the narrative.

Definitions

The term **Latinx** is a gender-neutral word for people of Latin American descent, and it is used as an alternative to Latino and Latina (Torres et al., 2019). Though the term is not without criticism, I used the term Latinx because my study employed narrative analysis and I wanted to be inclusive of all my participants' narratives, regardless of whether they identify as Latinx, Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or something else. While Latinx is my term of choice, I used others throughout this dissertation in accordance with the term used by the sources I cited or the words of my participants.

Students of color and **people of color** refer to students and people that do not identify as White. In their discussion of critical race methodology, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) use these terms to refer to individuals with Black, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American heritage. I use these terms throughout this study when my participants identified with these descriptions and in citing theories that address the experiences of these groups. For instance, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth, described below, is used to explore the experiences of Latinx students specifically but often refers to them as students of color.

Nationally competitive awards or **nationally prestigious awards**, terms which are used interchangeably throughout this study, are scholarships and fellowships that are offered at the national level by organizations and foundations and that carry a level of prestige. Students from all over the United States apply for these awards, which can be used for graduate study, research, and other opportunities. This study focuses on those

awards that have an international component such as conducting research abroad or enrolling in graduate study at an institution in another country.

The **Rhodes Scholarship** is the oldest prestigious scholarship and provides funding for scholars from the United States and other countries to pursue two to three years of graduate study at Oxford in the United Kingdom (Pinto Alicea, 2001).

The **Marshall Scholarship** is another prestigious award that funds graduate level study for students from the United States across several institutions in the United Kingdom (Mukharji, 2016).

The **Fulbright Program** focuses on educational and research exchanges between the United States and countries around the world (Edwards, Hoffa, & Kanach, 2005), and it provides funding for students to conduct research, pursue projects or graduate-level study, or teach English abroad for an academic year.

Boren Awards include both an undergraduate scholarship and a graduate fellowship for long-term study of critical languages abroad with a focus on national security (Edwards, Hoffa, & Kanach, 2005). Throughout the study, I use the terms Boren Awards when speaking generally and Boren Scholarship when referring to that award.

Theories of **capital** (Bourdieu, 1986; Becker, 1993; Coleman, 1988) are sometimes used in higher education research to explain student access and outcomes, but research often commingles these theories overlooking the phenomena they seek to expose (Musoba & Baez, 2009). Throughout this study, I engage with the term capital as the assets, skills, and resources students rely on throughout their academic journeys. When citing other research, I use the term as those authors intended even though doing so sometimes blurs these important distinctions.

Community Cultural Wealth is Yosso's (2005) theory that challenges traditional forms of capital and suggests that students of color possess community cultural wealth in the form of aspirational, navigational, linguistic, social, familial, and resistant capital.

Aspirational capital is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).

Navigational capital is the "skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80), particularly when these social institutions are not designed to support diverse individuals.

Linguistic capital refers to the communicative and sociocultural skills that come with multiple languages, including those that are less evident such as memorization and a sense of responsibility (Yosso, 2005).

Familial capital includes the support systems that are made up of nuclear and extended families, as well as the cultural knowledge and formation of values that is nurtured through these bonds.

Social capital focuses on supportive peers and contacts that serve as resources (Yosso, 2005).

Resistant capital points to challenging preconceptions and inequality and taking a stand against injustices (Yosso, 2005).

Counternarrative is a term sometimes used in narrative research (Espino, 2014) that is adopted from the critical race theory concept of counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), which refers to stories that run counter to the privileged stories of certain groups and the deficit-based stories of others, defying dominant stories of racial privilege.

Though race was not explicit in the stories of most of my participants, I use the term

counternarrative because it best captures my participants' application stories and reflects

how these counter the traditional deficiency narratives often told of Latinx students in the

higher education literature.

Summary and Organization of the Dissertation

Through this study, I began to challenge the existing narrative that suggests that

Latinx students lack the capital to successfully apply for and receive nationally

competitive awards. Using narrative inquiry as a methodology allowed me to better

understand the experience of these underrepresented students throughout the application

process. By conducting in-depth interviews, I was able to understand my participants'

experiences and perceptions, especially regarding community cultural wealth (Yosso,

2005). I was also able to explore cultural nuances in Latinx students coming from a

community where they are not underrepresented in the population. The findings of my

study can then be used by award organizations, fellowships advisors, and students alike

to encourage more underrepresented students to apply for prestigious awards – helping

Latinx students see that they do have what it takes to be successful.

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Following this first introductory

chapter, I use the second chapter for a review of the literature relevant to my study. In

particular, I discuss research on capital in higher education and then focus on views of

capital in Latinx students. The remainder of the chapter includes information about

nationally competitive awards, Latinx students and intra-group differences, and

community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). After the literature review, the third chapter is

a discussion on the narrative analysis methodology I used, as well as information on my

participants and on data collection procedures such as my interviews and the setting of

the study. Chapter Three also includes my positionality statement and a description of my

data analysis procedures.

The next four chapters contain my results, and the eighth chapter is a conclusion

of my study. Chapter Four contains descriptive information and profiles for each of my

participants, particularly in relation to their cultural backgrounds, their academic

experience, and their prestigious award application information. This is followed by three

thematic chapters. Chapter Five addresses the importance of the family, while Chapter

Six reveals other networks of support that were helpful to my participants as they applied

for prestigious awards. Chapter Seven focuses on cultural capital in the application

process, and in it, I include findings about how my applicants perceived their cultural

backgrounds as strengths. Finally, Chapter Eight summarizes my study and includes

implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research focused on the perceptions and experiences of Latinx students who applied for nationally prestigious awards, especially those awards that have an international component such as Fulbright and Rhodes. Specifically, I looked at this in relation to my participants' Latinx cultural backgrounds and in the related qualities and skills that make them competitive applicants. Applicants and awardees for prestigious awards have traditionally been somewhat homogeneous (Brownstein, 2001; Pinto Alicea, 2001), though granting organizations are working to change this. Also, research on Latinx students in higher education has often been looked at from a deficit model, suggesting that these students do not have what it takes to be successful in higher education, and this is often framed in theories of capital. This study told a counternarrative, and I was inspired by community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which emphasizes the less traditional types of capital possessed by students of color that help them succeed in higher education. Yosso's (2005) theory has been tied to forms of academic achievement, such as being admitted to and persisting in graduate school, in Latinx students and others. Still, it is also important to look at intragroup differences in Latinx students, as this opens the possibility for different experiences.

This chapter is organized according to the topics that are important in setting up the foundation for my study. I begin with a brief discussion on capital in higher education, as this allows for an understanding of privilege in the award applications and in higher education overall. In addition, the capital that my participants possessed and lacked in the application process for prestigious awards was of central importance

throughout my study. The next section of the chapter is an explanation of scholarships and of nationally prestigious awards, including the culture surrounding these awards and a summary of the existing research. In the next section, I introduce research on Latinx students, including counternarratives of academic achievement. I also note the importance of exploring intragroup differences in Latinx students. I conclude with a discussion about community cultural wealth and achievement in underrepresented students, including studies that have used this theory in different areas of higher education.

Capital and Higher Education

Research on capital and higher education looks at the capital that students have or do not have in navigating institutional processes and culture, and several theories of capital have been influential in this research. One of these is Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital, which purports that people accumulate economic, cultural, and social capital throughout their lives according to class structures. For Bourdieu, economic capital encapsulates all forms of wealth – money, property, etc. Cultural capital, on the other hand, reflects being well-educated and refined. In its different states, it refers to predispositions, objects and possessions that indicate one is cultured, and qualifications. Social capital includes networks, relationships, and resources, and it emphasizes those connections and memberships that provide people with backing and support to maintain privilege. According to Bourdieu, these forms of capital are acquired and cannot be taught, but they can be converted to other forms of capital. Instead, these forms of capital reflect class distinctions and perpetuate these differences. One of the ways this occurs is through education (Salas, 2016; Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). Although education is often

seen as a tool to promote social and class mobility, educational institutions actually serve to preserve differences between classes (Musoba & Baez, 2009). Systemic issues of access and educational preparation contribute to this process, and Bourdieu's work exposes the oppression of non-dominant groups.

Much of the research on capital in higher education does not view capital from Bourdieu's perspective of exposing class differences and oppressive class structures but rather from a more Americanized view of individuality and human capital. For instance, Becker's (1993) theory of human capital highlights individual agency, noting that people invest in themselves by acquiring skills, often through education and training, to promote future financial earnings that will contribute to their upward mobility. For Becker, these skills become part of the individual's human capital and cannot be separated from them. Coleman's (1988) work on social capital also focuses on relations between individuals, and he suggests that these relations give individuals access to the human capital of others (for example, children being influenced by the human capital of their parents). These theories center on individual agency rather than group experiences. Musoba and Baez (2009) argue that blending these perspectives with Bourdieu's masks the importance of class structures in understanding higher education, and while this research may benefit individual marginalized students, the systemic issues remain.

Despite these important distinctions, theories of capital provide a context for understanding the academic performance of students from minoritized backgrounds and their underrepresentation in applicants and recipients of prestigious awards. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) suggest that many students from minoritized backgrounds tend to lack the economic, cultural, and social capital that is often tied to academic opportunities and

achievement. Moreover, nationally competitive awards, one of the most prestigious forms of achievement in higher education, is no different. Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2009) also use human capital theory in combination with models of student choice in college to determine what influences students' decision to study abroad, which is also relevant in considering applications to nationally prestigious awards that have an international component. In terms of access, Bastedo and Jaquette (2011) argue that access to universities, particularly elite institutions, is much greater for students with high socioeconomic status that have the capital to prepare them and groom them for the admission process. They note that attending college is an expectation within their circles. Moreover, Salas (2016) claims that knowledge about college processes is a form of cultural capital that many low-income Latinx students do not have access to, which creates a barrier for college access.

In addition to issues of access, capital is also tied to achievement in higher education. Students with higher socioeconomic status and therefore more capital tend to live in wealthier neighborhoods with schools that have more resources to promote strong academic achievement (Frank & Cook, 1995, as cited in Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). These students, therefore, are more likely to have the academic preparation to be successful in college. However, many Latino students are living in less affluent areas and therefore have access to schools with limited resources, which leads to limited access to higher education (Gándara, 2017; Gándara, 1999). Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) also discuss research suggesting that Latino students, particularly first-generation students, tend to come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and therefore not be as academically prepared for college.

Even strong students sometimes struggle academically when they lack the preparation necessary to succeed and deal with conflicting priorities. In his research on the McNair program, a program designed to increase the number of promising underrepresented students in research and graduate programs by equipping them with the skills to be scholars, Vaughan (2017) found that most of the students' experiences focused on frustrations over completing their assignments, including dealing with tiredness in class and balancing this with their outside responsibilities such as employment and extracurricular activities. The students also expressed a lack of theoretical knowledge and preparation to guide their research and convey their research interests, that is, they lacked the capital to be successful in their academic endeavors.

Research on capital, therefore, suggests that Latinx students have limited capital in relation to higher education. They tend to have limited access to academic opportunities and to not be as prepared to be successful. Nationally prestigious awards are one of the highest forms of academic achievement, but the research suggests that Latinx students may not have the capital needed to be successful in these opportunities.

Nationally Prestigious Awards with International Components

Scholarships both reward and promote academic achievement in students. They can help students fund a college education or provide exciting educational opportunities outside of the classroom or after graduation. Hu (2011) summarizes research conducted on financial aid for students as a means of "equalizing postsecondary opportunities" (pg. 512) by allowing access to higher education for low-income students. Some scholarships come in the form of funding only, while others are part of larger programs in which awardees participate and receive support. In addition to need-based financial aid, special

scholarship programs – based on both need and merit – have been created at the national, state, and local levels to provide educational opportunities for promising students, including minority students (Hu, 2011). In addition, Salcedo (2012) discusses third-party scholarships, which may be based on need or merit but can also be awarded on other characteristics, as way of providing access to needy students. Many opportunities are available, sometimes too many, so that the searches are daunting for students and their families (Perna, 2008).

Nonetheless, access to higher education alone does not promote the academic success of all students, and students face several barriers in applying for scholarships. In fact, Mckinney (2009) criticizes Florida's Bright Futures Scholarship (BFS) program for perpetuating inequality in higher education by disproportionately awarding the scholarship to White students over minority and low-income students. Salcedo (2012) also points out that merit-based aid is awarded disproportionately to economically advantaged students. According to Perna (2008), students are deterred from applying for scholarships because of several perceived barriers such as lack of a centralized location to find and apply for awards, low award amounts that may be perceived as making too little difference, likelihood of being awarded, and perceptions of the time and effort involved in applying.

Nationally prestigious awards, on the other hand, are prestigious scholarships and fellowships offered at the national level and for which students from all over the country compete. These awards vary greatly in focus and eligibility. Students can receive awards for graduate study, to conduct post-graduate research, and countless other opportunities to further their professional careers. However, they all carry a high level of prestige. The

oldest competitive scholarship is the esteemed Rhodes Scholarship, which was established in 1904. It provides funding for 32 scholars from the U.S., along with other scholars from other countries, to pursue two to three years of study at Oxford (Pinto Alicea, 2001), often towards Masters-level education. The Fulbright program, which was established in 1946 following World War II, provides opportunities for educational and research exchanges between the U.S. and other countries and was aimed at mutual understanding and collaboration between cultures (Edwards, Hoffa, & Kanach, 2005). The Marshall Scholarship was created shortly after that in the early 1950s, and like Fulbright, was aimed at promoting diplomacy (Mukharji, 2016). This award also provides for graduate level study across several institutions in the United Kingdom, and according to Mukharji, began with a focus on academia but has expanded to other disciplines. The Boren Scholarship and Fellowship provides funding for undergraduate and graduate students, respectively, to study critical languages abroad. Boren is funded by the United States government and is focused on national security (Edwards, Hoffa, & Kanach), and scholars have a government service requirement. While there are many prestigious national awards – such as the Truman, the Goldwater, and the Udall – awards like Rhodes, Marshall, Fulbright, and Boren have an international component, as they fund students to study or conduct research abroad.

The Culture of Nationally Prestigious Awards

The culture of nationally prestigious scholarships has traditionally been selective and elite, and the awardees have historically been homogeneous. According to Brownstein (2001), the trend has been for most recipients of these prestigious awards to be White students at Ivy League institutions. Bastedo and Jaquette (2011) argue that

access to universities, particularly elite institutions, is much greater for students with high socioeconomic status that have the capital to prepare them and groom them for the admission process. Moreover, nationally competitive awards reward the level of academic performance and the opportunities that are valued at these institutions. Though the number of students from minoritized backgrounds that have been awarded prestigious scholarships has increased over the years, the ratio is not representative of the U.S. population, and the majority of awardees are still White (Kueppers, 2016). Similarly, Pinto Alicea (2001) describes the experience of a Latino Rhodes Scholar who notes that unlike him, his classmates grew up with resources and mentors and knew what they needed to do in order to be successful and competitive in applying for nationally prestigious awards.

Nevertheless, the culture of nationally competitive awards is slowly changing. As the U.S. student population grows increasingly diverse, the organizations that award these scholarships are seeking to diversify their applicant pools and recipients (Gerz-Escandon, 2017). For instance, the officers of the Fulbright program often describe the program as "elite but not elitist." Though they continue to emphasize the elite nature of the program and the fact that they seek top students, this claim is in reference to the perception of prestigious awards that are seen as elitist because they tend to award only certain students. However, they are trying to change the narrative. Also, fellowships advising is growing as a profession within higher education, and as Gerz-Escandon (2017) suggests, advisors are promoting awards to a wider population of students and finding ways to be more inclusive in their advising.

Research on Nationally Competitive Awards

Most of the research on scholarships focuses on merit-based scholarships for undergraduate or graduate study (Hu, 2011; Mckinney, 2009; Perna, 2008), but there is a significant lack of empirical literature on what inspires students to apply for scholarships, especially these nationally competitive awards. The available research is in the form of dissertations, but there are few peer reviewed articles on this topic. Moreover, the existing research is on regular scholarships and describes perceived benefits and challenges of awards, particularly in non-represented groups. Though she focused on high school students, Perna (2008) found that students' perceptions of about scholarships are influenced by their families and by their educational context including the school they attend and the messages they receive from their counselors. She suggests that perceived barriers to applying for scholarships include reliance on parents to pay for college, lack of a centralized location to find and apply for awards, low award amounts that may be perceived as making too little difference, likelihood of being awarded, and perceptions of the time and effort involved in completing applications. Other studies suggest that merit-based awards are given disproportionately to economically advantaged students (Salcedo, 2012; Mckinney, 2009).

Despite this limited empirical research, the National Association for Fellowship Advisors (NAFA) publishes volumes with information about nationally competitive awards and best practices for advisors. They also include advice about how to manage student perceptions and facilitate the application process. In one of these books, Simula (2017) discusses how underrepresented students, particularly students from minoritized backgrounds, sometimes experience the "imposter phenomenon" (p. 123) and feel like

they do not belong in higher education. She notes that these students sometimes attribute their achievements to external forces or even luck rather than their own talent and hard work. These feelings would deter them from applying for a prestigious award. In addition to these perceptions, sometimes high-achieving students are so busy on and off campus with school, work, internships, service, etc. that they may not stop to explore the opportunities available to them (Bourque, Cotten, & Mentzer, 2015). All in all, students' perceptions of themselves and of supposed challenges, as well as lack of information, are among the many factors that can influences a student's decision to apply for a scholarship or fellowship.

The Pursuit of International Opportunities

Because I am interested in internationally focused competitive awards that include experiences abroad, it is also important to consider what drives students to pursue international opportunities and what deters them from doing so. One of the most important factors in intent to study abroad is an interest understanding other countries and their cultures (Stroud, 2010). Studying abroad is often perceived as an opportunity for personal, academic, and professional growth. The Generation Study Abroad initiative through the Institute of International Education (IIE) highlights some of the personal development gains of studying abroad such as learning more about yourself and your culture, as well as gaining confidence and independence (IIE, 2018). They also describe some of the benefits that can lead to better employment opportunities such as language skills, an expanded worldview, networking, and adaptability skills. Despite the many perceived benefits of studying abroad, there is limited empirical research that

corroborates its value and positive outcomes (Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012).

Despite the benefits of international opportunities, a relatively small percentage of students study abroad. Moreover, the population of students that do pursue these opportunities is not diverse. In her review of the literature on study abroad, Stroud (2010) describes how minority students are greatly underrepresented in study abroad, especially when compared to the numbers of minority students in college. Twombly et al. (2012) explore some of the deterrents to study abroad that minority students face when considering international opportunities, such as limited finances, lack of familial/cultural support, and academic relevance of the program. They also note that many minority students lack the individual and human capital to recognize the value of and to apply for these opportunities. In addition, Twombly et al. discuss students' perceptions of who studies abroad and the availability of participants of similar backgrounds as being influential factors in minority students' decision to study abroad. This is also applicable to nationally prestigious scholarships, as minority students would be more likely to apply if they saw more of their peers doing so and demonstrating the value of international opportunities (Simula, 2017).

Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2009) employed human capital theory in combination with models of student choice in college to determine what influences students' decision to study abroad. According to Salisbury et al., the capital accumulated by a student before and during college should impact their decision about whether or not to study abroad as it would impact other decisions in college. They found that social and cultural capital – measured by an interest in reading and writing and an

openness to diversity – did significantly influence students' choice to study abroad. In addition, other indicators of capital were also positively related to study abroad, including socioeconomic status and level of parental education. Conversely, low levels of capital, such as dependence on financial aid, were negatively linked to a decision to study abroad. Moreover, Salisbury et al. also note that students that had attended a community college, which were mostly minority students, were also less likely to choose to study abroad. Overall, Salisbury et al.'s findings indicate a link between capital and intent to study abroad. This suggests that students with higher levels of social, cultural, and financial capital are more likely to pursue international educational opportunities.

Latinx Students in U.S. Higher Education

Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the United States, and the population of Latinx students is growing equally rapidly (Torres et al., 2019). In fact, Valdez and Lugg (2010) cite predictions from the U.S. Census suggesting that the population of Latino students will continue to grow and be one-fourth of all students in the United States by 2025. At Florida International University, the setting of my study, 61% of students report being of Hispanic origin (www.fiu.edu), and many of them are the first in their families to attend college. While there are systemic issues that need to be addressed so that these students can succeed in their academic endeavors (Gándara, 2017), research demonstrates that Latinx students do succeed academically and bring unique skills and strengths to their roles as students.

Latinx and Other Terms

Though I chose Latinx as the term to describe my participants, there are several terms that can be used to describe this group. According to Torres et al. (2019), Latinx is

a non-binary term used as an alternative for Latino and Latina. They note that Latino and Latina are the terms more commonly used in the United States to describe individuals from Latin American backgrounds, as these tend to share certain experiences. The terms Latino and Latina are also an alternative to Hispanic, which highlights language and cultural similarities but glosses over the differences in lived experiences among these groups (Torres et al.). Torres et al. also suggest that Hispanic is often the term of choice used in governmental and other reporting, though Hispanics/Latinos do not report a preference for either and often opt for identifying according to their country of origin. Despite these considerations, some of the research on Latinx students uses terms like Latino and Chicano interchangeably, when the latter only refers to those of Mexican American heritage. Though the term is sometimes criticized for excluding Spanish speakers who may have difficulty with the term (Onis, 2017, as cited in Torres et al., 2019), I chose to use Latinx in this study because of its inclusivity.

Heterogeneity among Latinx Students

In order to address the limitations in the research on Latinos and education, Torres (2004) writes about the importance of understanding the experiences of Latinx students from different countries of origin. She explains that even though Latinos share a history of Spanish language and colonization, as well as family and community values, differences such as the reasons for their immigration and the places in which they settled have led these groups to have different economic, academic, and social experiences in the United States. In particular, Torres (2004) discusses the distinct experiences of Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans (not including Mexicans). Puerto Ricans traveled easily between Puerto Rico and the mainland United States, given their

citizenship status, and settled mostly in New York thanks to quick and inexpensive flights after World War II (Torres, 2004). Cubans came to the United States in three waves mostly fleeing Fidel Castro's revolution: first the wealthy and educated middle class and professionals, then skilled workers and some professionals reuniting with family already in the United States, and finally a larger and more diverse group in the Mariel boat lift of 1980 (Torres, 2004). According to Torres (2004), Central and South Americans have immigrated to the United States for many different reasons, though mostly in search of financial opportunities because of wars and economic issues in their own countries of origin.

Torres (2004) calls for higher education professionals to understand the different countries of origin and generational status of the Latino students on their campuses, as these factors can have important impacts on the issues these students face. Cuban Americans have higher rates of high school completion than Puerto Ricans and Central and South Americans, though more Puerto Ricans and Central and South Americans than Mexicans have a high school education (Torres, 2004). Though Cubans are most likely to enroll in undergraduate higher education, South Americans are most likely to complete college (Torres, 2004). In another study, Geertz González (2013) found that Latino students of different ethnic origins perceived their cultural differences strongly and identified with both Latin culture but also had an affinity for their own countries of origin.

Similarly, the economic attainment of these students also varies by country of origin and leads to their different experiences. Puerto Ricans have the highest rates of poverty among Latinos, and although Cubans have the highest percentage of Latinos

making over $35,000 per year, significantly more non-Latino Whites are making this much (Therrien and Ramírez, 2000, as cited in Torres, 2004). In a different study on the cultural diversity among Latino students, most of the students studied reported that socioeconomic differences, particularly the way these students were perceived by other students on their campus, were challenging for their campus integration and engagement (Rodriguez, Parrish, & Parks, 2017). Torres (2004) also notes that generational status can bring about different experiences and that groups that have spent more time in the United States tend to be more educated. This is another nuance to understand in the Latinx population.

In addition to these differences, race is also important in understanding the experiences of Latinx students. Solórzano et al. (2005) use critical race theory to explore the inequities that Latinx students experience in higher education in the United States, and they highlight instances of racism in a call to change. According to Frank et al. (2010), how Latino immigrants identify racially varies by region, and skin color determines how they are viewed and how they experience racism. For instance, in her discussion on critical geographies, Price (2010) notes that what is considered "white" in Miami – the setting of my own study – is not viewed that way in other areas of the country, and certain groups have the power to make that determination. While race and racism are experienced differently across Latinx groups, "using the language of race forces us to look to the pronounced effects on minority communities of long-standing practices of racial discrimination" (Haney López, 2013, p. 485). This is especially key in understanding the experiences of Latinx students in higher education, as they are subject to systemic challenges in pursuing an education.

Academic Achievement in Latinx Students

 Even though students from minoritized backgrounds may be at a disadvantage in terms social and cultural capital and in their access to opportunities in higher education, nationally prestigious scholarships with international components are not out of reach for high achieving underrepresented students, nor should they be perceived this way. Strong students from minoritized backgrounds possess the very characteristics that make them competitive candidates for these awards. In their discussion of intrinsic motivation and academic achievement, Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) consider previous work indicating that Hispanic students are focused and involved, that they have high expectations for themselves, and that they are to persist despite facing obstacles, possibly due to personal characteristics such as cultural background and achievement before college. Peralta, Caspary, and Boothe (2013) discussed how Latinx STEM majors persisted and succeeded in higher education thanks to family support and encouragement. In a similar way, Geertz González (2013) describes cultural influences on coping and persistence in Latinx students. Zalaquett (2005) also studied successful Latino students, finding that family, scholarships, feelings of accomplishment, and support from their communities and from school staff motivated them to succeed.

 Though many Latinx students face factors such as poverty and limited access to good schooling (Gándara, 2017; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014), studies have demonstrated that these students have the capacity for success in higher education (Pérez, 2017; Zalaquett, 2005). As noted above, Torres (2004) suggests that there are differences in the rates in which different groups of Latinx students complete high school and college, though all groups show potential for completing an education. Torres et al. (2019)

describe how rates of Latinos continuing their education after high school have increased in recent years, though this does not necessarily translate to higher completion rates. Moreover, Gándara (2017) calls for fixing the systemic issues that are at the root of the challenges faced by Latinx students and notes their academic potential thanks to cultural knowledge that prepares them for "deeper learning" (p. 8) and critical thinking needed to succeed in higher education.

All in all, Latinx students show academic promise both in persisting in and succeeding in higher education. These traits that promote academic attainment directly relate to prestigious awards that tend to require high achievement, persistence through tenuous application processes, and confidence. Given these motivations to succeed, students from minoritized backgrounds that achieve high levels of academic success can certainly be strong candidates for prestigious scholarships and fellowships.

Community Cultural Wealth and Achievement in Underrepresented Students

Most of the research on capital and students of minoritized backgrounds in higher education has focused on the limited capital of minorities and at best suggested ways to counterbalance its effect on academic attainment. However, Yosso (2005) presents a different perspective to understand capital and argues that students of color possess community cultural wealth in the form of aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. Each of these types of capital represents a strength of students from minoritized backgrounds. Community cultural wealth is based in critical race theory, which according to Solórzano et al. (2005), is employed in revealing racism in higher education and in calling for change. Though community cultural wealth cannot be directly compared with more traditional theories of capital because it is based on

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individual characteristics and mobility while the others like Bourdieu's (1986) are based on class structures and distinctions, it offers a different way of exploring the experiences of these students. Rather than focusing on their lack of social and cultural capital, community cultural wealth theory highlights the richness of culture and experience that these students possess to propel them to succeed academically.

Yosso and Bourdieu have very different views of culture, and the two theories cannot be directly compared. Bourdieu (1986) views culture as capital, particularly dispositions, goods and artifacts, and educational attainment that make one cultured. As these cannot be acquired but are rather accumulated through time, groups generally either have cultural capital or do not because capital as a whole defines social classes, and a few individuals will be able to gain such capital only to mask its direct relation to social classes. Conversely, Yosso (2005) defines culture as "behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people," (p. 75), and she notes that it is fluid and inclusive of identities and traditions. As a result, everyone has culture in Yosso's view, and this forms the basis for her differences with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital. Nonetheless, community cultural wealth is based on individual characteristics that can promote social mobility in communities of color, and this is more in line with theories of human capital than with Bourdieu's theory that emphasizes class structures and differences. According to Musoba and Baez (2002), treating these theories as the same serves to mask and reinforce these class differences.

Despite these important distinctions, Yosso (2005) uses a lens of critical race theory to stress the importance of understanding the experiences of students from minoritized backgrounds. She also contests the explanations for poor academic

performance and achievement among minority students that place blame on them rather than on systemic issues. In fact, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) discuss counter-stories and counternarratives as a methodology that can be used to combat this deficit thinking and to tell the stories that may not have been told. Rather than ignoring cultural differences or ascribing to calls for inculcating minority students with the cultural knowledge that is valued in society and academia, Yosso suggests that students of color can be empowered by their culture and by the knowledge it instills in them. Therefore, community cultural wealth is, in essence, a counternarrative of Latinx students in higher education.

Yosso's (2005) conceptualizations of less traditional kinds of capital are relevant in higher education but can also be useful in looking at Latinx students applying to nationally competitive awards. For instance, the desire to succeed that makes up aspirational capital can motivate students to apply for these awards because of their prestige. Navigational, social, and familial capital can also assist students as they apply. Navigational capital is particularly important in underrepresented students because it points to the aptitude to navigate through institutional systems that are not designed for them. As noted previously, underrepresented students do not typically have the preparation to excel in institutions of higher education (Trevino and DeFreitas, 2014), so they would certainly benefit from resources and individuals to help them work through these systems. Latinx students can also benefit from supportive people in their social and familial networks as they persist through lengthy application processes. Values like hard work and determination that can make up a student's familial capital can also encourage them. According to Yosso (2005), linguistic capital refers to the communicative, sociocultural, and even artistic skills that come with multiple languages. She suggests that

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these lead to other skills such as memorization, ability to communicate effectively across audiences, and even a sense of responsibility. Finally, resistant capital promotes challenging the status quo and succeeding in the face of odds, which can also serve to propel underrepresented students to apply for nationally prestigious scholarships.

Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth has been used to study the experiences of minority students in higher education. Peralta, Caspary, and Boothe (2013) applied community cultural wealth to study persistence in Latino STEM majors. They found that aspirational and familial capital helped these students continue their education. Students were inspired by stories from their past and/or from their families that encouraged them to strive to get ahead. In addition, though their families had not modeled or fostered the idea of a STEM education, family support and encouragement was important in the academic persistence of these STEM students. Peralta et al. suggest that teachers and the school system were not encouraging to these students, so they recommend systems that nurture Latino students' less traditional types of capital. Similarly, Pérez (2017) looked at high-achieving Latino male college students and found that few of these students were supported by faculty members and administrators. In fact, most were not comfortable around faculty and instead relied on their peers for support in achieving their academic goals.

Wick and Willis (2018) adapted Yosso's theory to study abroad and proposed that Latinx students possess unique strengths that can promote success in international academic opportunities and later professional success. In their subsequent longitudinal study, Wick et al. (2019) found that linguistic and familial capital were central in study abroad students engaging with their host culture and connecting with people there. In

addition, the students' experience of community cultural wealth impacted them by strengthening their bicultural identities. This study is particularly relevant to my research because it focuses on how community cultural wealth is helpful in adapting to culture abroad, which would be important for applicants to prestigious awards that have international components, as they would be conducting the work proposed in their applications abroad.

O'Shea (2016) analyzed the experiences of Australian students that were the first in their families to pursue higher education through community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). While Yosso's framework focuses on students of color, O'Shea applies it to first-in-family students, indicating that though the fit is not perfect, first-in-family students share many of the kinds of capital that are part of community cultural wealth, as they are also a minority. The findings of her study suggest that there are assets other than educational knowledge and traditional types of capital that are valued in higher education. In particular, the first-in-family students interviewed reported drawing on aspirational capital, resistant capital, and familial capital. In this study, all of the participants reflected aspirational capital through their dreams of obtaining a university education. O'Shea's participants described resistant capital, as well – being motivated to pursue their education and to persist especially when others told them they would not succeed because of their social class or other circumstances. In addition, the participants in this study noted that family members provided encouragement despite being unfamiliar with academic processes, that family was often their inspiration for obtaining an education, and that attending a university changed their family conversations and made them more supportive of education (O'Shea, 2016). Finally, O'Shea also found that

her participants possessed something she called experiential capital, which referred to the life skills they had acquired that made them better able to navigate the university. In the end, O'Shea suggests that institutions should value the capital that diverse students bring with them rather than classifying these as deficient or trying to make the students change or acclimate.

Espino (2014) studied the experiences of Mexican American doctoral degree recipients in accessing and persisting through Ph.D. programs using Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth. According to Espino, research on graduate education emphasizes the importance of socialization processes and faculty mentorship and suggests that students of color may not have access to these or to the cultural capital needed to succeed. Her own findings indicate that aspirational, linguistic, navigational, social, resistant, and familial capital were related to access to graduate school in their programs. Resistant capital was most notable in Espino's findings – evident in participants that succeeded on purpose to defy the expectations of faculty and advisors that underestimated them. Social capital stemming from key contacts that fostered valued types of cultural capital was also important. The participants also expressed aspirational capital and navigational capital as important in accessing graduate school. According to Espino, it was more difficult to find instances of community cultural wealth that promoted persistence in her participants. Instead, she found that most of her participants reflected on the challenges they faced as they pursued graduate studies: fears, feeling like they were not smart enough and did not belong in graduate school, unsupportive faculty and administrators. A couple of participants even described instances when faculty belittled them and tried to get them expelled from the program. A few described

aspirational capital as related to persistence – they could not fail as Mexican Americans, as they would be failing their communities. Espino's findings suggest that community cultural wealth can help students through undergraduate education and in graduate school admission but that its less traditional types of capital were not as effective in getting students through graduate school.

Gaps in the Literature

As noted previously, there is limited research on nationally prestigious awards outside of dissertations and trade journals for award advisors. Much of the available research on scholarships is focused on merit-based scholarships for undergraduate or graduate study (Hu, 2011; Mckinney, 2009; Perna, 2008), which are very different from prestigious awards and have much more involved application processes. While the research reported in dissertations and the advice provided in resources for award advisors are valuable, the scarcity of empirical research on this topic presents an opportunity for further study in this area.

Another limitation of the existing literature is that most of the research on Latinx students is on students of Mexican or Mexican American heritage, which forecloses the experiences of Latinx students from other cultural backgrounds. For instance, research has tied positive outcomes in higher education to community cultural wealth in underrepresented students, but most of the studies published thus far have focused on Mexican American students. Even Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, which comes out of LatCrit or Latino critical race theory, is based on Chicano students. Espino's (2014) research on doctoral degree students discussed above focuses on students of Mexican descent who completed doctoral degrees. Though they grew up in different

areas of the United States and some even in Mexico, they all shared Mexican heritage. Espino (2014) herself reported being interested in this topic because of her own Mexican heritage. Similarly, Peralta, Caspary, and Boothe (2013) describe their participants as either born in Mexico or first-generation Mexican Americans. The research conducted by Wick et al. (2019) on Latinx students that studied abroad also included a majority of Mexican American students, as both researchers are based in institutions in California where the Latinx population is primarily of Mexican descent (Motel & Patten, 2012). Although this is warranted because the majority of Latinos in the U.S. are of Mexican descent (Torres, 2004), this means that the current research on community cultural wealth comes from only one Latinx perspective.

In addition, some of the literature on community cultural wealth uses the terms Chicano and Latino interchangeably. Though some researchers acknowledge their focus on students of Mexican heritage (Espino, 2014; Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013; Ramírez, 2011), most of the research on Latinx students in general does not examine the nuances and heterogeneity of Latino culture (Rodriguez, Parrish, & Parks, 2017; Geertz González & Morrison, 2016; Torres, 2004). For instance, in their analysis of community cultural wealth and how educators can better relate to Latinx students and promote their academic success, Valdez and Lugg (2010) refer to Latinx students as Chicanos/Latinos throughout their article. While much of the research focuses on Chicano students, grouping the terms seems to foreclose the possibility that students of other Latinx backgrounds may have a different perspective and may experience community cultural wealth differently.

Summary

According to the research on capital and higher education, students from

minoritized and underprivileged backgrounds do not have the preparation or the

resources to succeed in higher education. This suggests that Latinx students would also

have limited capital in applying to prestigious awards, as these tend to require high levels

of academic achievement and the ability to navigate the institution in compiling the

applications for these awards. Though there is not a lot of research on nationally

competitive awards, the information available indicates that awardees tend to come from

privileged backgrounds and institutions. Nonetheless, the literature on Latinx students

highlights strengths and skills that they bring to higher education, and these often

promote achievement in these students. Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural

wealth provides a counternarrative and looks at non-traditional kinds of capital in Latinx

students. Community cultural wealth has been applied to several studies in different areas

of higher education. In this study, I use it as support in understanding the capital that my

applicants bring to the application process for prestigious awards.

The next chapter includes information about the methodology of my study on

Latinx applicants to prestigious awards. Using narrative inquiry, I explored the

application experiences of my participants through interviews. My participants had

applied to nationally competitive awards with international components through Florida

International University, and they identify as Latinx. Once the interviews were

transcribed and coded, I conducted a thematic analysis on my data, which yielded three

themes that addressed my research questions. Throughout Chapter Three, I discuss the

methodological decisions I made during my study, as well as how they may have

influenced my results. I also address integrity and positionality issues, as these are

important in any qualitative study but especially in one like mine that is about narratives.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of my study was to explore how Latinx students perceive the application process to nationally prestigious awards, particularly in regard to culture, as their stories are key to understanding the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that they bring to the application process and how they experience that process. In order to understand their experiences, I used a narrative inquiry methodology that allowed me to study the stories of my participants in applying to nationally competitive scholarships. Through two semi-structured interviews, my participants revealed their application narratives and how these intersected with culture, particularly their identities as Latinx students, and with their perceived competitiveness as applicants. After coding and analyzing this data, I arrived at three themes that served to answer my research questions and highlight the strengths that Latinx applicants to nationally prestigious awards bring to those awards and the application process.

This chapter describes the procedures used in my research to explore the prestigious award application experiences of my participants, as well as the rationale for my research decisions. Beginning with a discussion on qualitative research, I go on to introduce narrative analysis as a way of understanding the application stories of my participants. Then, I explain how my data sources are the narratives of my participants as uncovered through their interviews. After speaking about sampling and the decisions surrounding my interviews, I go into a detailed description of my data collection process, including interview procedures, transcription, and data management. The next section of the chapter focuses on my procedures for coding and data analysis, as well as how I

arrived at the themes common in the application experiences of my participants as underrepresented students. Finally, I end the chapter with a reflection on integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness in this qualitative study, as well as with a discussion on the limitations of the study.

Research Design and Methodology

In order to explore the perceptions and experiences of Latinx applicants to prestigious awards, I undoubtedly chose qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research is used to study subjective phenomena such as lived experiences (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013), so it was the obvious choice for my study. While employing a qualitative methodology was most useful in allowing me to understand the experiences of Latinx applicants to nationally competitive awards, qualitative research is meant to study a particular phenomenon (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). As a result, my results are true for my participants in my own study, but they cannot be generalized to other students applying for these awards or even to other students of color or Latinx students.

In conducting qualitative research, Savin-Baden and Howell Major suggest that researchers need to explore not only their research goals but also their way of viewing the world, as these will have important implications on important decisions that are made in the research. For me, I approached my study from a critical perspective. Lather (2006) suggests that realities are constructed according to power inequalities, and in my research, the realities of Latinx students applying for prestigious awards are influenced by power and inequality, as they may not have had the resources to prepare them to seek out and apply for these awards. In my use of the term counternarrative, I also borrowed from Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) work on counter-stories as a critical methodology for

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going against the often deficit-based research on communities of color, and my participants' narratives often ran counter to those deficiency narratives. Using my participants' narratives to illustrate counternarratives suggesting that Latinx students do bring strengths to the application process reflects my critical paradigm. My critical research, therefore, is a call to action, and as a researcher, I am an "advocate and activist" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 196). Moreover, according to Delgado (2013), "stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (p. 72). Working within qualitative inquiry allowed me to reveal my participants' application experiences and tell their narratives.

Narrative analysis focuses on the stories of how people interpret their experiences (Riessman, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This methodology is in line with my research on how Latinx students perceive their strengths in applying to nationally prestigious awards, as their stories were key to understanding the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that they bring to the application process and how they experience that process. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) suggest that narratives are not only a way to know more about experiences but also data in itself, a research approach, and a research product. According to Connelly and Clandinin, "the narrative is the phenomena studied in inquiry" (p. 477), so this methodology is used to study stories discovered through interviews, texts, etc. In this study, my participants' narratives were data that were analyzed and interpreted and formed a critical piece of the research report reflecting the themes of my results. This is in line with some of the other research on community cultural wealth (Espino, 2014; O'Shea, 2015) that has also been based in narrative inquiry.

Throughout her book on narrative analysis, Riessman (2008) suggests that there is no one right way of doing narrative analysis. She notes that the narrative is central, but the researcher must make many decisions in the process of carrying out narrative inquiry. Because there is no prescribed way of doing this work, the researcher's paradigmatic assumptions, the theories with which they are working, and other perspectives guide the methodological decisions made (Riessman; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). As a result, studies can look very different based on how these decisions are made, and this indicated that the methodological decisions I made may have foreclosed other potential discoveries in my study.

Qualitative research and narrative analysis in particular are best suited to address my research questions because these are focused on exploring experiences. My first research question was about how Latinx applicants to nationally prestigious awards perceive the application process in relation to non-traditional types of capital. Because narrative inquiry is about telling stories of experiences (Riessman, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), this methodology was useful in addressing this research question. Similarly, my second research question focused on the culture and competitiveness of prestigious awards, and qualitative methods are best for answering this question, too, especially since it relates to perception. My final research question asked about resources that were helpful to my participants in the application process, and the narratives related in their interviews served to highlight these resources and individuals, as well as to describe how they were helpful. In the end, narrative analysis was effective in answering my research questions and accomplishing the goals of my study.

Data Sources and Sampling

My data are made up of the narratives uncovered through interviews with Latinx students at Florida International University (FIU), particularly those who applied for nationally competitive awards. Because I used a narrative methodology, the focus of my research was the narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) – the stories of these students' experiences as underrepresented applicants throughout the application process and how these stories relate to the types of capital that make up community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Because my interest was in the application experience, my participants are students that completed the application process for several different nationally prestigious awards, regardless of whether or not they won the award.

FIU is a large, public, Hispanic Serving Institution with highest research designation that is located in Miami, Florida. Because Miami is home to a diverse Hispanic population, I was able to explore intra-Latinx differences in perceptions of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Torres (2004) notes that differences in countries of origin and in generational status lead to different experiences in Latino students. Almost 50% of the nation's population of Cuban origin resides in Miami, and large groups of people of Colombian, Honduran, and Peruvian descent also live in Miami (Motel & Patten, 2012). The area around the university is also home to several Central American communities, particularly Nicaraguans. One of the first questions I asked the participants was to describe their cultural background. While this was an open-ended question and I did not ask about race or country of origin specifically, most of them answered this question in terms of country of origin and generational status in the United States, and race was not mentioned very much. Nonetheless, my research setting

provided me with the opportunity to examine the experiences of a much more diverse group of Latinx students than that which has been studied in much of the previous research on community cultural wealth, as much of this work has focused on students of Mexican backgrounds.

Because my population of interest is very specific, I used purposeful sampling to select participants that reflect the goals of my research. Other studies on community cultural wealth (Espino, 2014; O'Shea, 2015) have also used purposeful sampling to obtain data from them populations of interest. Through critical-case sampling, I was able to identify cases that demonstrated the phenomenon of interest (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). In order to accomplish this, I reached out to institutional applicants to nationally competitive awards with international components. Though these awards reside in different departments across the institution, I had access to them because I have served as an advisor for a couple of prestigious awards and have participated in several campus committees for others. Also, one of my dissertation committee members previously served as the advisor for some of these awards. This enabled me to contact applicants after the application cycles and invite them to participate in an interview.

In order to be true to my study as narrative inquiry and also to maximize the number of potential participants, I invited all students that had applied to nationally prestigious awards in the application cycle that had just ended to participate in my study. This way, I did not limit my participant pool to students that I determined to be Latinx. In their work on community cultural wealth in Latinx students, Peralta et al. (2013) also relied on self-identification in their participants. I prepared an email to be sent to our institutional applicants, inviting them to participate if they identified as Latinx. I used the

term Latinx to be inclusive, though several of my participants used the term Hispanic instead. The message explained the purpose of my study and what their participation would entail. I attached the informed consent for their review, and I invited them to contact me via email if they were interested in participating. As the institutional advisor for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, I sent the email to the applicants to that award. A colleague that advises for the Boren Scholarship and Fellowship forwarded my message to the applicants to those awards. Our Office of Scholarships, which at the time worked with my dissertation committee member on other prestigious awards like Rhodes and Marshall, forwarded my email to students that had been endorsed by FIU for those awards. Because I only had seven participants after this endeavor and wanted to explore the experiences of a few others, I applied for an IRB amendment to include applicants from previous application cycles. Upon approval, I worked with the same entities to invite applicants from the previous two application cycles to participate.

Sample size is an important determination in qualitative research, and in the end, I had a total of nine participants. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) discuss the many factors that go into making determinations about how many participants are needed, and they state that the answer often depends on paradigm and on the research itself. Some things to consider include what the research calls for, how much data will be collected, and how many people have the characteristics of interest to the researcher. Espino's (2014) research on community cultural wealth in graduate school access and persistence had a sample size of 32, but this was part of a larger study. Other narrative research has far fewer participants. For my study, a handful of students fit the criteria for participation – identifying as Latinx and having applied to a nationally prestigious award through FIU.

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Riessman (2008) and Connelly and Clandinin (2006) also suggest that there is no right number of participants or data sources.

Because my research is an analysis of the narratives of my participants, having a smaller sample size allowed me the opportunity to conduct a deeper exploration of my participants' experiences in the application process for prestigious awards. However, it also may have limited the breadth of experiences that I was able to capture in my study. Having more participants may have provided the opportunity to explore the narratives of Latinx students from more countries of origin or from more racially diverse backgrounds who may have experienced the application process differently and may have other perceptions of their strengths as applicants. For instance, none of my participants identified as Afro-Latino, and though I did not specifically ask about race, race was not particularly salient in my participants' descriptions of their cultural backgrounds. In addition, a larger sample may have also allowed me to interview even numbers of students that had applied to each award, as the majority of my applicants applied to the Fulbright award and only one applied to the Rhodes and Marshall scholarships. Having multiple participants that applied to the different awards may have implications for their experiences that may not have been captured in my study.

Ethics were also an important consideration in my sampling decisions, as well as in planning the timeline for my research. I decided to begin collecting data in the spring semester, which was ideal for the study because the application deadlines for most nationally competitive scholarships, particularly Fulbright and Rhodes, are in the middle of the fall semester. Therefore, I was able to interview my participants soon after they completed the application processes, and they were able to describe their experiences

more thoroughly. In addition, this timeline also mitigated ethical concerns, as I was no longer in an advisory role with these students because their applications had already been submitted to the appropriate scholarship organizations. Though I had to go back to the IRB to request to interview applicants from previous application cycles to complete my participant cohort, I was no longer serving in an advisory capacity for the applicants from previous cycles either, so there were no ethical dilemmas in interviewing them for my study.

Data Collection

In order to uncover the narratives of Latinx applicants to nationally prestigious awards, I used a series of two semi-structured interviews to obtain an in-depth understanding of their stories. Interviews are often used in narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), and they are also used in studies done through a critical approach (Brenner, 2006; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Because I approached my study through a critical paradigm and because community cultural wealth is based on critical race theory (Yosso, 2005), interviews were an appropriate option for collecting data for my research. The interview protocol I created allowed me to explore the types of capital that make up community cultural wealth in the application stories of my participants. I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each of my participants, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. I audio-recorded these interviews and transcribed them, storing the data in secure data clouds in preparation for coding and analysis.

In planning my research, I consulted the literature on interviewing and narrative analysis to make important decisions such as the type of interview to use, the medium for

the interviews, and the appropriate number of interviews. In narrative inquiry, there are no strict recommendations regarding interview decisions, but the literature suggests that these decisions must be carefully planned to be in line with theory and philosophy and that context is an important consideration (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Reisman, 2008). In discussing interviewing, Brenner (2006) also argues that these decisions should be guided on theory and on the phenomenon of interest. According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), critical social theory research is transformational and focuses on a deep understanding of ideologies and how they influence how reality is seen. Connelly and Clandinin note that "living, telling, retelling, and reliving" (2006, p. 478) are important aspects of narrative analysis and that studies can focus on one or more. In this study, my goal was to examine my participants' telling of their experiences through a critical lens, and in narrative inquiry, the telling of experiences and the meanings generated are commonly captured in interviews (Mishler, 1986, as cited in Connelly & Clandinin).

I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews, as this entailed having a base of questions to guide the conversation but also gave me the ability to follow up on answers to those questions as needed. This also allowed me to deviate from the interview protocol to ask additional questions for clarification or expansion (Brenner, 2006), as well as to add questions as they related to my study. Riessman (2008) emphasizes the conversation in narrative interviews and the importance of discoveries that may come up outside of prescribed questions. In fact, other studies exploring community cultural wealth in higher education had utilized semi-structured interviews (Espino, 2014; O'Shea, 2015). Moreover, because my research was framed by a critical theory paradigm, semi-

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structured interviews allowed me to explore the ideologies, feelings, and motivations around my participants' experiences in deciding to apply for prestigious awards, particularly as they related to community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) also suggest that words are important in critical theory, so hearing directly from participants and using their words is important. This is also reflective of narrative inquiry.

Though I went in a different direction upon analyzing my findings and ended up using this more as literature support, my interview questions were originally based on community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), particularly around the types of capital which I felt would be most relevant to the application process for nationally competitive awards. I used Savin-Baden and Howell Major's (2013) "Sample Interview Protocol" (p. 368) to construct an interview protocol (see Appendix A) that would allow me to accomplish my research goals. My semi-structured interview consisted of 11 questions that allowed me to learn more about the award to which the participant applied, what they proposed to do if awarded, and what inspired them to apply. I also asked the participants about their cultural background to gauge how they identify with Latinx culture. The interview protocol also contained questions addressing the components of community cultural wealth – linguistic capital, social capital, navigational capital, familial capital, and resistant capital.

Brenner (2006) emphasizes the role of theory in interview research and suggests that theory should inform interview questions, and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) formed the base of my interview protocol. Inquiring about linguistic capital was important because of the impact that language skills can have on a competitive

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application for a prestigious award, as well as the related communication, vocabulary, and cultural skills that would allow my participants to be successful abroad. Questions on navigational capital were meant to explore students' ability to seek out the resources that would make them successful and to rely on the support of role models. In the case of Latinx students, this is sometimes key because they may be the first person in their family to attend college. Asking about familial capital helped me examine the support networks of underrepresented students and determine whether students have cultural values passed on through their families that motivated them to apply for nationally competitive scholarships. Finally, resistant capital questions were utilized to reflect challenges faced by my participants and how they channeled these into action. These questions were meant to guide the conversation in which my participants described their application experiences and how these were colored by culture and community cultural wealth.

In order to explore the application experiences of my participants, I conducted two interviews with each of them, borrowing from Seidman's (2006) three interview scheme. Even though Seidman's model is often used in phenomenological research, it was also applicable in meeting the goals of my narrative research. Because I already had rapport with most of my participants from having advised them or served on their institutional award committee, I skipped Seidman's traditional first interview. Instead, I adapted Seidman's (2006) recommended second interview to my first, which I used to answer any questions my participants had about my study, to obtain signed informed consent forms, and to conduct my semi-structured interview according to the interview protocol. My second interviews with my participants were modeled on Seidman's third interview, and the purpose of this interview was to review my interpretations of the first

interview and to co-construct the narrative with each of my participants. Because the story and how it is told are central to narrative analysis (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), my first and second interviews were separated by at least four weeks, allowing time for my participants and for me to reflect on the first interview and have a richer story in the second one.

In my study, each of the interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The recommended length of interviews also varies in the literature and should be in line with the researcher's philosophy and methodology (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Seidman (2006) recommends that interviews have a duration of 90 minutes, while Connelly and Clandinin (2006) discuss a narrative study that examined one 50-minute interview as well as studies with several participants and spanning several years. I did not have a strict time limitation, as I wanted the interviews to close organically according to my participants' telling of their stories. Therefore, I spent a total of two to three hours conversing with each participant. I audio-recorded each of my interviews in order to prepare accurate transcripts, allowing me to be more present in my conversations, as my critical theory paradigm requires involvement and shared discourse in interviews (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013).

Because context and body language are important in looking at data from a critical paradigm (Brenner, 2006) and I wanted to take note of them, I decided to conduct face-to-face interviews. This provided an opportunity to observe my participants more closely and note nonverbal cues and context, as these are all key to their stories. In fact, in-person interviews are the most common forms of interviews (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Interviews are critical because they give a voice to the participants so that

they can describe their experiences more fully including how they make meaning (Brenner, 2006). In the beginning of my study, my interviews took place at Florida International University, as I thought that my participants would feel comfortable in a familiar setting. However, once the campus was closed because of the COVID pandemic, my interviews moved to the videoconferencing platform Zoom. This allowed me to remain true to my plans of conducting face-to-face interviews and observing my participants' nonverbal communication and context. Using the university's Zoom account also provided security and protection to my participants.

After I completed my first round of interviews with the participants, I used the audio recordings of the interviews to prepare transcripts. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), transcription is a way to begin understanding data. Though I originally intended to transcribe the interviews by hand, I utilized a transcription service to produce the initial transcripts. Because my research is framed as a narrative analysis, the stories told by my participants were critical in analysis. Therefore, I carefully reviewed the transcripts, comparing them to the audio recordings and making edits accordingly. Because I wanted to explore the shared meaning-making and understanding of power that is reflected by recording the interview, I included pauses and filler words following denaturalized transcription (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). Later in the writing phase and after conversations with my major professor, I edited some of my participants' quotes to remove some of these filler words when they distracted from the essence of what they were communicating. During the transcription process, I made notes in a journal about this process and any issues that arose. Once the transcripts were finalized, I saved them on two secure data clouds – Dropbox and One Drive – as I prepared to code them.

Coding and Data Analysis Procedures

Analyzing the data uncovered in my interviews included the development and analysis of themes that would explore the experiences of my participants, Latinx applicants to nationally competitive awards. As I conducted my interviews with my participants and transcribed them, I coded the interview transcripts using descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2009) and analyzed the data to develop themes. In narrative analysis, Riessman (2008) suggests that interpretation begins at transcription. Guided by Braun and Clarke (2006) process of thematic analysis, I went through several stages of re-working my themes until deciding on three themes: the importance of the family, networks of support, and cultural capital in the application process.

I initially coded the interview transcripts by hand using descriptive, or topic, coding (Saldaña, 2009). Like with other methodological decisions, the type of coding used depends on the type of analysis that will follow it and on the goals of the research. According to Saldaña, descriptive coding is versatile and appropriate for several forms of data analysis, and it involves capturing the topic discussed in a portion of the data by using a few words. Codes developed from the raw data are reliable and may lead to increased validity (Boyatzis, 1998), and it is up to the researcher to analyze them according to theory. I considered using In Vivo coding because it draws from the words of the participants (Saldaña), but I decided to proceed instead with descriptive coding because it would allow me to code by topic, which was more appropriate in analyzing my data into themes that addressed my research questions. Also, by using quotes from the interview transcripts, I would still be able to honor the voices of my participants even though I did not necessarily use them directly in coding.

As I coded the first transcript, I made a note of the codes used on a master list of codes as suggested by Buttina (2015). As I coded the subsequent transcripts, I used codes from this list, added new codes, and refined some of the codes to best represent the data. Once I coded the transcripts from my first interviews, I used NVivo software to record the codes and provide an organized and visual representation of my data. This was also helpful in sharing the interview transcripts with the participants during the second interview, which was used for member checking and for reviewing the narrative told in the first interview. At the end of these second interviews, I transcribed the respective audio recordings, again using a transcription service. I reviewed the transcripts with the audio recordings, as well, and I proceeded to code them by hand and enter the codes into NVivo software. This process allowed me to become very familiar with my data, which is key in initiating data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After I had coded all of the transcripts and entered them in NVivo, I began organizing the codes into patterns and themes, keeping community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in mind. Braun and Clarke (2006) propose a step-by-step process for analyzing and finding themes in data. The first step involves becoming familiar with the data, including transcribing and reading the data several times. Because of my approach to working with my data, I engaged in several readings of my data as I transcribed it, coded it manually, and coded the data in NVivo. This allowed me to examine the data at multiple points, especially as I coded the interviews of different participants and saw how they related to each other. The second step involves generating initial codes, though I had already done this in my initial coding of the interview transcripts.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the next steps are looking for potential themes and reviewing them. Because I originally intended to use community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as the theoretical framework for my study, I initially categorized the codes according to the types of capital in community cultural wealth, which became sub-themes in the larger theme of "Community Cultural Wealth in the Application Process for Prestigious Awards." Most of the remaining codes addressed my second research question, and I formed a theme around them – "Perceptions of Award Competitiveness." A handful of codes remained, and because they did not coalesce into another theme or match the two existing themes, they were discarded. According to Braun and Clarke, the final step in thematic analysis is writing up the results into a report. Once I wrote up a draft of these results and discussed them with my major professor, it became clear that this original analysis masked important findings. In trying to group my codes into the types of capital in community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), my analysis overlooked the centrality of the family in my participants' prestigious award application experience. "The Importance of the Family," therefore became my first theme. My initial analysis also disregarded the social capital and cultural capital that my applicants brought to this process, and these became the second and third themes in my results. Part of how I arrived at these new themes was through conversations with my major professor, as these allowed for a richer analysis.

Coding and analyzing my data involved several steps, and according to Braun and Clarke (2006), analysis is not a linear process. Instead, they suggest, it is a process of going back and forth from coding to writing to reading. After using descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2009) to code my data, I recorded my codes using NVivo. Following thematic

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analysis procedures suggested by Braun and Clarke and by Buttina (2015), I grouped the codes into themes according to community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and began writing about these themes. Nonetheless, I ended up revising these to three different themes that better captured the essence of my data – family, networks of support, and cultural capital in Latinx applicants to nationally prestigious awards.

Integrity, Credibility, and Trustworthiness

Integrity is central to narrative inquiry, which calls for disclosure and transparency because of its focus on stories, which need to be genuine. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) note the importance of the researcher's positionality, especially because of the meaning-making that takes place between the researcher and the participants in narrative inquiry. The researcher must be very open and honest, and ethics are central to this methodology. Tracy (2010) also highlights sincerity in the form of self-reflection and transparency on the part of the research. Because the focus of my research is the stories of the participants, it is very important to be respectful to participants and transparent about the research process. As an advisor, I am invested in the success of students on these awards. As a high-achieving Latina student and scholarships advisor, I am an advocate for more students from underrepresented backgrounds to apply for and receive these awards. My role also gives me a certain degree of credibility, and I was careful with my research timeline to ensure that I was no longer in an advisory role for the participants at the time of their interviews.

In my study, openness and disclosure of researcher stance included disclosure of my own biases as an advisor for prestigious awards – in my research proposal, in my IRB application, and in my interviews with participants. From my initial invitation to award

applicants to participate in my study, I included an informed consent document describing my study and expectations of participation that had been approved by my institution's IRB. This way, participants were well-informed about the purpose of my research and any rewards and risks associated with their participation. At the beginning of the first interview, I discussed the informed consent document with each participant, answered any questions they had, and obtained their signature before beginning the interview. To ensure that I remained ethical as the interviews progressed, I reminded participants that they did not have to answer questions that made them uncomfortable and that they should answer truthfully rather than saying what they thought they should say.

To ensure credibility, trustworthiness, and quality, I also implemented other strategies suggested in the literature on qualitative research. While this is important in several forms of qualitative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) suggest that researchers should write down their own thoughts, especially in the beginning of narrative inquiry. Journaling became a key part of my research, and I began writing about why I wanted to pursue this research even before I sent out invitations to participate in the study. I had a notebook dedicated to my thoughts during the research process, and I wrote notes after my interviews, as I coded transcripts, and as I analyzed my data. This allowed me to have a chronology of my research process but also to help me see how I made certain coding decisions.

Other strategies have also been helpful in establishing trustworthiness in my study. One of these is methodological coherence, which involves clearly describing a methodology that is in line with the study and framing paradigm (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Working on a detailed research proposal and consulting with my faculty, I

was able to ensure that my study would be methodologically sound. Keeping track of my thoughts and actions during the research process through journaling allowed me to adhere to my research plan and to document the process, allowing me to maintain rigor and sincerity of my study (Tracy, 2010). Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) also point to the importance of member checking – going back to participants for verification. This is already an important part of narrative inquiry because of the centrality of the participants' stories to the research (Reisman, 2008). My second interview with my participants was helpful in this endeavor, as they were able to see their words from the first interview and how it told their application story and provide feedback and clarification if needed. Tracy (2010) also discusses how participant reflections and member checking contribute to the credibility of a qualitative study, and she goes on to describe how details and thick description also promote credibility in qualitative work. Furthermore, Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) also emphasize dense description as essential in ensuring quality and credibility. Because narrative inquiry calls for details and using the participants' words in telling their stories, this was central to my research, providing further credibility and trustworthiness.

Researcher Positionality Statement

According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), narrative inquiry should be "positioned within a lifespace" (p. 483), and they advise that researchers write their own narratives as related to the research topic prior to beginning their research. I decided to pursue this research because of my own personal and professional experiences. Personally, I am a Latina woman who works hard to excel academically and professionally. My parents immigrated from Cuba in the late 1960s and settled in Miami,

working hard to achieve the American dream. I grew up in a loving home with a close family, and my parents encouraged education because they had not been fortunate enough to obtain an education in Cuba. I identify closely with all aspects of my Cuban culture, and I grew up speaking Spanish at home. Professionally, for ten years, I have worked in international education, valuing internationalization and diversity. This has included advising stellar students applying to nationally competitive award for traveling abroad. My research combines these two important pieces of my identity.

As an undergraduate student studying psychology, I was a promising student and could have been a competitive applicant for a nationally prestigious award. I had a 3.99 GPA, years of research experience working with a faculty mentor, and academic and community involvement. However, as a first generation, working class student, I did not know I could apply for these awards. I thought Fulbright was a very prestigious program that only Ph.D. students did, and I did not even think to inquire about it. Traveling abroad, especially for so long, was not an option I could even fathom. In addition, I was busy working to be able to afford school and doing research so that I could be a competitive candidate for a Ph.D. program.

I realize now that I had considerable community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) during that time. Like many of my participants, I had navigational capital in having to figure things out on my own. I sought out mentors, looked for answers to my questions, and came back to my parents to explain how things worked. I have a substantial amount of linguistic capital, as I am fully bilingual. Knowing Spanish helped me with knowing the Latin roots for scientific terms and for words on exams like the GRE, and I acquired skills in translating for my parents over the years. I also possess familial capital in parents

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who were unconditionally supportive and who taught me the value of hard work and determination. Similarly, I also have social capital in supportive mentors and friends. I still carry aspirational capital, wanting to get ahead, make my parents proud, and help them achieve the American dream. Finally, my resistant capital allowed me to excel despite the obstacles. This included the challenge of navigating an affluent and mostly white institution when I was neither of those.

In the end, this research reflects me and my identity as a high-achieving Latina student and as an advisor wanting to form part of the social capital of other underrepresented students. My experiences as a first-generation Latina student definitely got me where I am today – a higher education professional trying to give students access to the same opportunities I had and to others beyond that.

Summary

In order to analyze the experiences of Latinx applicants to nationally competitive awards, I used narrative analysis methodology within qualitative inquiry. This allowed me to explore their stories of the application process, particularly how their Latinx culture played into this process and contributed to their being competitive applicants. My participants revealed their narratives throughout two semi-structured interviews, and I transcribed these narratives after audio-recording the interviews. Using descriptive coding to code this data and thematic analysis to examine it, I developed three themes that reflect the non-traditional capital that makes Latinx applicants to prestigious awards competitive. Because integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness are central to qualitative research, I have included information about how my experience makes me credible in

carrying out this study, the practices like journaling and member-checking that kept me credible, and my own positionality in relation to my research.

The next chapters address the results of my study. Chapter Four includes a general information about my participants, as well as brief profiles of each of them. The following three chapters center on the themes uncovered in my study. Chapter Five addresses the importance of the family in influencing my participants and in serving as supports for them, a central theme that permeated my results. Chapter Six is on other networks of support that were critical as my participants applied for nationally competitive awards. In Chapter Seven, I concentrate on cultural capital and how the presence or absence of different types of cultural capital were perceived by my participants in the application process and how this motivated them. In each of these three chapters, I tie the themes back to Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND PROFILES

The purpose of my study was to explore the strengths that Latinx applicants for nationally competitive awards bring to the application for these awards. More specifically, I examined the types of capital that my participants experienced in the process of applying for these awards. In this qualitative study, I used narrative analysis to better understand my participants' application experience through the stories they told during their interviews, focusing on how they made sense of the strengths they brought to the application process.

The research questions I used to guide this study focused on how Latinx applicants to prestigious awards experienced traditionally undervalued types of capital throughout the application process, how they viewed their cultural backgrounds in relation to their competitiveness for the awards, and what resources they found helpful as they applied for the awards. After noting descriptive information about my participants, I will focus the rest of this chapter on profiles of my participants, describing their cultural and academic backgrounds and how these relate to the awards to which they applied. The next three chapters demonstrate the results of the study and are organized into themes and subthemes that address the research questions for the study.

Descriptive Information

My research participants were nine students who identified as Latinx or Hispanic and who had recently applied for a nationally prestigious award through Florida International University to enroll in graduate study, conduct research, or teach abroad. While I used the term Latinx for inclusivity, my participants more often identified as

Hispanic or according to country of origin, which is not unusual according to Torres et al. (2019). All but one of the participants were juniors or seniors at the time of application, and the other participant was enrolled in a master's program (see Table 1). Most of them majored either in STEM fields or in international and public affairs. Five of the nine participants had applied for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, three had applied for the Boren Scholarship for National Security, and one had applied for both the Rhodes and Marshall Scholarships. Though my research interests were solely in the application experience regardless of award status, it stands to note that three of the participants were awarded, two were semi-finalists, and one received institutional nomination for their respective programs.

Table 1

Participant Academic Information

Participant	Prestigious Award	Field of Study	Level
Joann	Fulbright U.S. Student Program	Biology	Senior
Daniela	Fulbright U.S. Student Program	English	Senior
Santiago	Fulbright U.S. Student Program	International Relations	Senior
Marcos	Boren Scholarship	Criminal Justice	Junior
Liliana	Boren Scholarship	International Relations Philosophy	Junior
Vanessa	Boren Scholarship	Public Administration	Senior
Gaby	Rhodes Scholarship Marshall Scholarship	Biology	Senior
Jorge	Fulbright U.S. Student Program	Psychology	Senior

Isabella	Fulbright U.S. Student Program	Environmental Studies	Master's

The participants were diverse in demographics (see Table 2). Their ages ranged from 21 to 40, with two participants being non-traditional college students. As I expected because I conducted my research in South Florida, the students differed culturally from the Latinx students that are most frequently studied. Though much of the research – including research on community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) – is on students of Mexican origin (Wick et al., 2019; Espino, 2014; Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013), my participants identified as Cuban, Puerto Rican, Colombian, Dominican, Argentinian, and Ecuadorian. They all reported Spanish as the first language they learned or learning both English and Spanish simultaneously. Moreover, of the nine participants, five were female, three were male, and one was non-binary. Because I am using narrative inquiry to represent the application stories of my participants and their telling of these are important (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), I will be using the participants' chosen pronouns throughout this text. The participant who identifies as non-binary has chosen the pronoun *elle* (pronounced EH-yay), which *elle* was excited to discover because it combines the Spanish *el* (he) and *ella* (she).

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Cultural Background	Generation Status	
			in the U.S.	in College
Joann	21	Cuban	First	First (in U.S.)

Daniela	21	Argentinian; Ecuadorian	First	First
Santiago	25	Puerto Rican	Born in U.S.	First
Marcos	40	Cuban	Immigrant	First
Liliana	22	Cuban	Immigrant	First (in U.S.)
Vanessa	21	Colombian; Cuban	First	First
Gaby	22	Cuban	First	Second
Jorge	34	Puerto Rican; Dominican	Born in U.S.	First
Isabella	28	Puerto Rican	Born in U.S.	First (in U.S.)

Many of the participants were also first-generation students, and an interesting consideration uncovered in the interviews was what constitutes first-generation. Three of the participants were U.S. citizens born in Puerto Rico, two were immigrants from Cuba, and the other four were the first generation in their families to be born in the mainland United States. Nonetheless, their generational status in the U.S. did not necessarily match their generational status in terms of higher education. Because the purpose of my study was to explore the community cultural wealth my participants brought to the application process for nationally prestigious awards, I felt it was important to ascertain their and their family's experience with the higher education system in the United States. Only one of the participants was a second-generation student, even a legacy student at Florida International University. The other eight participants were all the first generation in their families to attend college in the mainland United States. While three of the participants had parents that had attended college in Puerto Rico or in their native country of Cuba, their parents' experiences of higher education were very different from their own

experiences at Florida International University in Miami. Therefore, in this study, I have used the term first generation to refer to educational generational status in the United States unless otherwise noted.

Participant Profiles

The following are brief biographical statements about each of my nine participants. These short profiles include information about my participants' cultural backgrounds and identities, their families, and their academic experiences. I also discuss the prestigious award for which each participant applied and their relevant experience for that award. Through this section, I introduce each of my participants so that the reader is familiar with them in reading the subsequent thematic chapters.

Joann

Joann is the only daughter of Cuban immigrants to the United States. Her parents were professionals in Cuba, but they came to the United States in order to raise a family in a place where they had more freedom. Joann told the story of her family's bravery in fleeing Cuba in a dangerous journey by sea. She also spoke about how her parents, grandparents, and uncle worked hard at grueling jobs in order to maintain the family once they were in Miami. Joann was born in Miami, but she identifies a lot with the Cuban culture. Her first language was Spanish, and she recalled, "I learned Spanish at home, like, all my first words were in Spanish." She learned English in school, and she describes the process of language learning "like a little puzzle piece was being formed." Her family always spoke Spanish at home, and they maintained Cuban traditions in her home.

After attending private Catholic school, Joann began her academic career at Florida International University. She studied biology and economics, and she is planning to attend medical school. Though Joann says they never pushed her or influenced her choices, her academic pursuits are an interesting tribute to her parents. She said, "My mom's a doctor, and my dad's an economist, and my major is econ, and I want to be a doctor." In addition to her academics, Joann was a very engaged student. She was a student athlete, which is very demanding, and she maintained very good grades with a challenging course load. In addition, she was actively involved in research on campus and through summer research opportunities. Joann also studied abroad, and she was an honors student. While she is first-generation in her family born in the United States, her parents went to college, so she is not technically first-generation in college. Still, we spoke about how, "It's completely different" because higher education in the United States has so many variations from how her parents studied.

Joann decided to apply for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program after learning about it from another student in one of her research labs. The student had just returned from a Fulbright opportunity and told Joann all about her experience. Joann looked into the program options and decided to apply so that she could conduct research abroad in order to be better prepared for medical school. After doing some research, she found a research lab in her proposed host country where the research complemented some of the previous research she had done previously. Joann reflected on how she felt that everything connected as she was working on her application. With her strong academic record and her research experience, Joann was a competitive candidate for the Fulbright award.

Daniela

Daniela was born in the United States, but she very much identifies with her Latinx culture and is "extremely proud of the Ecuadorian and Argentinian side." Though she is proud of both, Daniela said the following of the Argentinian culture: "I grew up watching the soccer team, eating the foods. I speak like someone who's from Argentina." Daniela's mother came to the United States from Argentina, and she grew up between both countries. Her father came from Ecuador later in life for economic reasons. Daniela is bilingual in English and Spanish, and she said, "I learned both growing up. My grandmother mostly raised me, and she would speak to me in Spanish. My mother would speak to me in English, though, so I grew up speaking both." Daniela also spoke about valuing family stories and learning from her elders.

Daniela graduated from Florida International University with honors with a degree in English, and she planned to attend law school. During her academic career, she was very passionate about language and vocabulary. As a student of language, Daniela spoke a lot about her experience with language and how it related to her identity. She understood phonetics and mechanics, but she also reflected on how "every language has different phrases and ways of expressing yourself, and you come off a different way." She noted how this would be important in adapting abroad if she were awarded the Fulbright. Daniela also wanted to give back to her community and beyond, and she volunteered as a language tutor.

These experiences directly related to Daniela's decision to apply for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program to teach English abroad. She learned about the program because a friend of hers had applied for Fulbright previously, and she had tagged along and

attended an information session with her. When she was eligible for Fulbright, Daniela

knew that she wanted to apply so that she could continue teaching the English language

like she was doing through her tutoring role. It would also give her the opportunity to

teach the language she had dedicated her undergraduate career to studying in depth and

use some of the strategies she had learned. This, combined with her excellent academic

record, set Daniela up to be a good candidate for this award.

Santiago

Santiago was born in Puerto Rico and moved to central Florida with his family

when he was five years old. He and his siblings grew up speaking both English and

Spanish, English with their mother and Spanish with their father. He recalled that when

he moved from Puerto Rico, his school tried to put him in ESL classes because they

assumed that he only spoke Spanish, but his mother intervened. He also spoke about

navigating a bicultural identity:

> In Puerto Rico right now, there's kind of like the concept of either you're
> from there or you're an outsider or someone that left. Like, for me, um,
> I'm kind of like in the middle of that because I was born in Puerto Rico,
> but I grew up mostly outside of it. So, whenever I go back to Puerto Rico,
> people can tell, uh, with my Spanish there's an accent that is not exactly,
> um, like theirs and they automatically think, "Oh, he's from like the
> mainland," even though I was born there. [Santiago, Interview I].

Having lived in a mostly white community in central Florida and participated in

programs across the United States, Santiago was also very aware of cultural differences

and his identity as a student of color. He said, "I'm a person of color. I need to keep on

moving with my life because every time that I don't seek to improve myself, like, that's

time wasted in my opinion."

Santiago studied international relations, and he became interested in this when he received a scholarship to study abroad during high school. He studied languages in high school and continued learning these over the years. After studying at a community college, he transferred to Florida International University to complete his undergraduate studies. Santiago studied abroad again during this time, also through a scholarship. In fact, he participated in several programs across the country and abroad, and he was awarded a few prestigious scholarships. He and his siblings are the first generation in college, so he disclosed having to educate his parents about most of the things he does.

Following these opportunities, Santiago decided to pursue a master's degree abroad, and he applied to the Fulbright program to help him accomplish this. His experience in his host country propelled him to want to continue his studies there. Moreover, because he had participated in several prestigious programs and had international experience, he was a good candidate for the award. Also, having applied to several programs in the past, he was prepared to put together a solid application for the Fulbright program.

Marcos

Marcos immigrated to the United States from Cuba with his parents and sister when he was eighteen years old. Growing up in Cuba, his native language was Spanish, and he learned English once he was in the United States. Marcos reported that he identifies with his Cuban culture quite a bit, speaking Spanish at home and even speaking in a mix of English and Spanish during his interviews. He also noted that he and his mother communicate a lot with their family members that are still in Cuba and that he has even visited Cuba since moving to the United States. Marcos also disclosed that his

Cuban culture may have made it difficult for his parents to accept his identity as a gay man, saying that "I had to educate them in so many different ways about me being a homosexual." Throughout his interviews, he suggested that this was a key part of his identity. He also spoke about wishing he would have had more support from his parents in other areas of his life such as pursuing his education:

> I did not have that support from them to lay down that foundation, to give me that steppingstone, to say, "You know, this is going to be the right approach." As a matter of fact, it came down to my determination, to what I really want. [Marcos, Interview II].

Though his parents did not have the knowledge to guide him towards pursuing his education, Marcos spoke about how his sister is supportive of his endeavors.

Having returned to finish his college degree later in life, Marcos spoke a lot about his academic experience as a non-traditional student. He disclosed the challenges he faced, from family and friends not understanding what he was doing or why he was doing it to navigating the college experience as a first-generation in college and non-traditional student. He also expressed the urgency he felt in obtaining his degree, and he insisted that at 40 years old, he had no time to waste. Marcos studied criminal justice and was interested in pursuing a career in the federal government.

Marcos applied to the Boren Scholarship to study abroad and continue learning a critical language. He also hoped that the Boren award and the skills he could acquire if awarded would make him competitive for achieving his career goal of working with the federal government. Marcos was already familiar with his proposed host country, and in his application, he highlighted the personal and professional experiences that made him a strong applicant for the Boren award.

Liliana

Liliana was born in Cuba, moved to Mexico with her family at four years old, and then moved to Miami with them four years later. She is an only child, though she mentioned that she has half-siblings that she does not know well. Having grown up in Cuba and in Mexico, Liliana's native language is Spanish, but she learned English early on because she attended a bilingual school in Mexico. She identifies strongly with her Cuban culture, and throughout her interviews, she made distinctions about Cuban culture and Miami's Cuban culture. In speaking about some Miami Cuban foods, she said, "That's not a thing in Cuba. It's a very Miami thing." Liliana revealed that the supervisor for an internship she participated in had moved to Washington, DC when he arrived from Cuba, so his Cuban culture was not influenced by Miami culture. She said that in her conversations with him, she learned that she could "have a Cuban identity and an American identity and that they can coexist." Liliana also disclosed that she has never felt like an underrepresented student and that she identifies as a white Cuban.

Academically, Liliana studied international relations and philosophy. Her parents were academics in Cuba and valued education:

> I come from a family of academics. It was very much instilled in me that I
> have to go to college, I have to afterwards get a job and whatever I wanted
> to do after, they always told me that… you just have to be the best at.
> [Liliana, Interview I].

However, her experience in the United States educational system was very different from that of her parents in the Cuban system. In her own studies, Liliana was part of a fellowship program that exposed her to career options in her field of international relations. She was also interested in learning languages and participated in co-curricular

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activities like Model United Nations. Liliana wants to pursue a career in the federal government.

In order to accomplish these career goals, Liliana applied to the Boren scholarship to study abroad and learn Russian. The Boren award focuses on national security, which is an academic interest of hers and she has experience researching this area. Liliana's strong academic record and her extracurricular engagement were strengths in her application. Also, if awarded, Liliana would also be competitive for a career in the federal government.

Vanessa

Vanessa was born in the United States, but she identifies closely with her Latinx culture, particularly the Colombian side. Her father is Cuban, and her mother is Colombian. Vanessa spoke about how the difficulties her father faced growing up in a poor family in Cuba encouraged her to want to pursue an education and get ahead, as well as about how her mother's Colombian culture is filled with laughs and good food and keeps her motivated. Vanessa's first language was Spanish, and she learned English in school, but she described having a complicated relationship with language:

> I'm not, like, perfect in Spanish even though it was my first language, but I'm not perfect in English either. Because I went in only speaking Spanish, I missed a lot of like fundamental basic things, like, even some simple grammar rules that I'm like still catching today and reviewing and learning that I don't think I grasped it very well during my childhood because I was, like, in between the two languages. [Vanessa, Interview I].

Vanessa recalled speaking Spanish at home with her parents but secretly communicating in English with her siblings.

Vanessa is a first-generation in college student, and this is an important part of her identity and experience. She spoke about participating in a program that guides first-generation students and their families in navigating the college process. This program provided mentorship for Vanessa and her parents to prepare them for college. Even then, she described that her parents did not understand her experiences and mentioned that she relied on mentors instead. Once in college at Florida International University, Vanessa studied public administration with the goal of working for the government. She recalls that her mother always encouraged her to work for the government because of the benefits of jobs in the public sector. Vanessa had a strong academic record and was involved in leadership of an honor society in her academic discipline. She also studied abroad on a language and culture program, and while she enjoyed experiencing a new culture, living abroad exposed her to the inequities and class oppression that others experience.

Vanessa applied to the Boren Scholarship to study abroad again, this time to focus on critical language learning. Because her career goal was to work for the government, the Boren award would allow her to be competitive for this in the future. She would also have the opportunity to use her language skills and her academic experience in the public sector to work towards social justice. Given her experience abroad, her academic record, and her extracurricular involvement, Vanessa was a competitive applicant for this award.

Gaby

Gaby identifies as Latine, which is another non-binary term for individuals from Latin American heritage, and uses the nonbinary pronoun *elle*, which combines the

Spanish words for he (*el*) and she (*ella*). Having Cuban parents, Gaby's cultural background is Cuban, and *elle* identifies strongly with Cuban culture. Gaby said,

> I can't say that I particularly just belong to one culture. It's hard for me to say that because like, even though, like, I am Cuban and I did have that upbringing and the culture and the values and all that stuff, I didn't even step foot once in Cuba. So, it's kind of like, it's like I'm American, but I'm also Cuban. It's a very odd in between, if that makes sense. [Gaby, Interview I].

Gaby is also fully bilingual in English and Spanish, speaking English with parents but Spanish with other relatives like *elle's* grandparents. For Gaby, knowledge and use of the Spanish language provided an important form of self-identification in the use of the pronoun *elle*.

Academically, Gaby was an honors student that studied biological science and obtained a very impressive 4.0 grade point average. *Elle* participated in a plethora of research opportunities and internships since high school, obtaining invaluable experience along the way. As a result, *elle* had several research mentors. Gaby was also actively involved with the honors program. In addition, *elle* was engaged in activism with the LGBTQ community on campus and even started a student organization. After graduation, Gaby hoped to pursue doctoral work.

Gaby applied to the Rhodes and Marshall scholarships in order to pursue graduate study and research in the United Kingdom. *Elle* said, "I have a research background, and I really wanted to do research, so I wanted to apply to see if, um, I could get the opportunity to do research in, um, another country." With such a solid academic background and research experience, *elle* was well-qualified for the prestigious Rhodes and Marshall scholarships.

Jorge

Jorge was born and raised in Puerto Rico, and he lived there until he decided to move to mainland United States for college. He and his siblings were raised in a working-class household with a Puerto Rican mother and a Dominican father, and he described how his parents would jokingly argue about which of the two cultures Jorge and his siblings identified with most. While he values both, his Latino identity is most important to him:

> I always say that I'm Puerto Rican, Latino... Yeah. I don't, like, identify as anything else lately. I'm just Latino. If someone asks, "What's your background? Where you're from?" Then I say, "Well, I was born and raised Puerto Rico, half Dominican." [Jorge, Interview I].

Jorge's native language is Spanish, and he learned English in school. He and his family closely identify with their Puerto Rican culture in terms of cultural practices and customs, and he and his sister continue these while living in Florida.

Jorge is a non-traditional and first generation in college student. Despite beginning college at eighteen years old, he began working to be able to afford school. He said, "Unfortunately, work took over," and he did not continue school for several years until he enrolled in a community college a few years ago to continue his studies. Upon graduating, he transferred to Florida International University to complete his bachelor's degree in psychology. At that point, he began participating in research with two faculty members and studied abroad on a research program with them. These professors have continued to advise him, and he is currently in a graduate program in public health and thinking about future study. Moreover, Jorge has done well in balancing his

responsibilities, as he completed his schooling and maintained good grades all while working.

With his research experience and at the recommendation of his faculty, Jorge decided to apply to the Fulbright U.S. Student Program to continue his research abroad. He was already an experienced researcher, which made him a strong applicant. Also, his academic record made him well qualified for the award. Jorge had also been to his proposed host country already, and he reflected on how he appreciated the similarities between this proposed host culture and his own Puerto Rican culture.

Isabella

Isabella was born and raised in Puerto Rico, and she lived there with her family until she completed her undergraduate degree. She described her family as "very Latinos," and she spoke about being family oriented and the amicable nature of her culture. Isabella's native language is Spanish, but "English is all around us as the second language." Isabella and her brother grew up in a family of professionals, as their father is a pharmacist, and their mother is a teacher for exceptional students. According to Isabella, being exposed to this population through her mother's profession taught her the importance of inclusion, especially in education, and this has been influential for her personally and professionally.

Isabella has always been a strong student. Her undergraduate degree in science in Puerto Rico was funded through a merit-based scholarship awarded by a governmental organization, and Isabella was actively involved in research opportunities throughout her undergraduate career. Upon graduating, she participated in a funded program to help her prepare for graduate school. After this program, she began her graduate degree at Florida

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International University. Having lived and studied in several parts of the United States, she said that aside from the academic opportunities and the faculty, one of the reasons why she chose this program was because, "I knew I wanted to be in Miami because I wanted to be around Latinos." Isabella was actively involved in various research projects in environmental science throughout her graduate program, further contributing to her research experience.

As a result of this work, Isabella applied to the Fulbright program in order to continue her scientific research abroad. She found a unique opportunity through Fulbright, and she used her previous research experience and even contacts she had obtained through other initiatives to put together a proposal. Since she chose a proposed host country in Latin America, she had the language preparation for the award. Her research proposal, cultural fit, and strong academic record helped make Isabella a competitive candidate for the award.

Summary

This first results chapter contained general information about my participants, as well as more specific individual profiles on each of them. The general information included demographics, the academic backgrounds of the participants, and the prestigious awards for which they applied. I also discussed their cultural backgrounds, highlighting the diversity of Latinx experiences encompassed in the study – Cuban, Puerto Rican, Argentinian, Ecuadorian, and Colombian. While my question about identification with Latinx culture was open-ended, my participants mostly identified according to country of origin and generational status, and few of them discussed race. In the participant profiles, I described how each of the participants identify with their Latinx culture and more

details about their plans in applying to their respective prestigious awards and how their academic experiences helped make them competitive for these awards.

This chapter serves as a foundation for understanding the application experiences of my participants by first understanding a little about them and their stories. The next three chapters are also results chapters, each focusing on a different theme uncovered in my study. The next chapter is about the importance of the family in the application experiences of my participants, and the one after that in on other networks of support that were key in the application process for my participants. In the chapter after that, I discuss my participants' cultural capital in relation to their applications for nationally prestigious awards.

CHAPTER V

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY

The family is central in Latinx culture (Geertz González & Morrison, 2016; Torres, 2004; Yosso, 2005), and the first theme uncovered in my research reflects the significant role that the families of my participants played in their application experiences for nationally competitive awards and throughout their higher education journeys overall. My participants described their families as influential and noted that they imparted important lessons and values that carried them through the application process. They also described the levels of support that their families provided and how this related to their decisions to apply to the awards and impacted the application process itself. The importance of the family came across in different ways in the stories told by the participants, but overall, it formed a central part of the capital that they brought to the application process for prestigious awards. It also helps to answer my first research question about how Latinx applicants to nationally competitive awards perceive and experience the types of capital that make up community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

This chapter is organized into three sub-themes that make up the larger theme of the importance of the family in my study. The first sub-theme is Family Encouragement and Influence, which includes both direct advice and motivation from families and how my participants were influenced and impacted by the stories told by their families. In the second sub-theme of Values Passed on through Family, I discuss my participants' reflection on cultural values such as determination, hard work, and self-improvement, as well as how these were inculcated by their families. The final sub-theme in the importance of the family is family support, and this includes examples of families being

supportive of my participants and instances when they may not have agreed with or may not have understood their decisions to apply for prestigious awards. Following the discussion of the three sub-themes, I synthesize the information and discuss how these results fit with my research questions and my study overall.

Family Encouragement and Influence

The family was a central theme in my study, and the encouragement and influence provided by my participants' families was significant. This subtheme was evident in all of my participants' narratives, as they each described experiences or stories in which their parents motivated them to be successful and sometimes even as Gándara (1995, as cited in Yosso, 2005) explained, wanted them to move beyond what they had achieved. All of my participants reflected on lessons learned from their families and on how their families encouraged them to be successful. My participants recounted family stories that influenced them in pursuing opportunities and goals, and they spoke about how their families inspired them and about the sacrifices that their families made in order for them to be successful.

Family stories about the difficulties that my participants' families faced and how they wanted more for their children illustrated the influence of the family. During her first interview, Joann related the story of her parents' bravery in escaping Cuba with their family and the struggles that they faced in reaching the United States, as well as about how this motivated her. Though they had steady jobs in Cuba, Joann said that her parents did not want to raise a child there because they did not have freedom. After years of working hard, they have provided Joann with a good education and constantly encourage her to pursue opportunities and do well. She said, "My mom definitely kind of, like,

instilled that curiosity in me. And, um, my parents are very, like, my dad is very like,

'You can do anything that you believe you can do!'" Joann went on to mention that she

and her parents are very close, and that she discusses all important decisions with them.

Though they were not too happy that she would leave if she was awarded the Fulbright,

they encouraged her to pursue opportunities that would help her reach her goals.

In a similar way and through teary eyes, Vanessa told a story about a visit her

father made to his hometown in Cuba and the extreme poverty in which his family

continues to live there: "For my dad to come back and be like, yeah, he's like, 'I used to

live in those conditions,' you know? And come back and be like, 'You need to study so

you don't work as hard as I do.'" This impacted her and helped her understand why her

father was so focused on promoting her academic achievement. Vanessa went on to say

that her family has always emphasized education:

> Um, so yeah, they, they've always, in terms of education, um, they've
> always pushed me to, like, get my education. My mom, since I was little
> was like, "You're going to college, you're going to university, you want to
> get a government job. They have the biggest benefits." Like she would
> always, kind of, like, talk to me about it. [Vanessa, Interview I].

She also spoke about how her mother always brags about her academic accomplishments

to her family in Colombia. While Vanessa mentioned feeling guilty that her cousins in

Colombia do not have the same opportunities that she has in the education system in the

United States, she appreciates these opportunities and does not take them for granted. In

Vanessa's case, her family's experiences motivate her to succeed.

The narrative uncovered through Daniela's interviews encapsulated the essence of

family encouraging success in Latinx students. Her father and mother immigrated to the

United States from Ecuador and Argentina, respectively, but her mother spent a longer

portion of her life in the United States. While she reflected on the constant support she

received from her mother during her interviews, Daniela also talked about how her family

– her father in particular – was influential and always taught her to have high ambitions:

> At least in my family, there's this belief that you have to– The best way to
> love someone is to give them all the tools you need to be the best, to be the
> best version of themselves. And it's not a cutthroat thing. It's more like,
> my dad always tells me this, "My wish is for you to be better than I am,"
> because he, he doesn't have, I don't think he has college either. Neither of
> my parents do. [Daniela, Interview I].

Having spent more time in his home country of Ecuador and coming to the United States

to improve his economic situation, Daniela's father wanted her to have the opportunities

that he did not have. She went on to speak about how proud her father is:

> He's so proud of my achievements as if he had gone to college and
> studied, and he's like, "I'm so proud of you. Um, I, I want you to do
> everything you want to do, everything you dream. And I don't care if you
> have more degrees than me, if you know more than me, if I feel dumb
> talking to you because this is what I want for you." And I think this was
> every, something every parent should want. He tells me every parent
> should want their kid, in Spanish, to *superarlo*, to be better. Surpass them.
> [Daniela, Interview I].

For Daniela, her father's encouragement and the support she received from her family

were integral to her academic experiences, and she sought opportunities like Fulbright to

help her achieve that level of success.

A couple of my participants talked about how they appreciated the sacrifices that

their families made over the years so that they could have better lives and more

opportunities. During her first interview, Joann spoke about the first years that her family

spent in the United States – they worked long hours during difficult shifts at intense jobs,

even though they had all been professionals in Cuba. She noted that even her

grandparents worked this hard, all so that they could build a life in Miami. According to

Joann, she and her cousins had a head start in life thanks to the sacrifices her family had

made over the years:

> Essentially, we were what they were saving up for. But now us, like, with
> this head start that we have, which is what they saved up for... like, we
> don't have the same urgency of like, "Oh, um, well, would we be able to
> achieve the American dream?" Like, well, I'm in the process of it, but I'm
> not afraid that I'm never going to reach it because I'm already here.
> [Joann, Interview I].

For Joann, she was already living what her parents wanted for her, and future

opportunities like Fulbright and medical school would only cement that. Daniela also

reflected on the sacrifices her family made for her future:

> It's like their whole lives are dedicated to making sure that I'm happy and
> I have a good future. And there's a lot of sacrifices that are made,
> something that you don't– things that you, you're not even aware of
> because they hide it so well, and that's what I take away from them.
> [Daniela, Interview I].

In these cases, my participants' families worked hard so that they could have

opportunities and bright futures.

The participants that immigrated to the United States with their families seemed

to have a different kind of urgency to pursue their dreams. They not only had the drive

and the lessons that were passed along by their parents, but they also had an intrinsic

motivation to get ahead and make a better life for themselves and their families. For

instance, Marcos explained that he and his parents shared the desire to make progress in

life because of his culture and because they immigrated to the United States to seek better

opportunities. Marcos shared that they emphasized this ambition in his upbringing:

> Us Cubans, we have that drive when we- especially us Cubans coming
> from Cuba. That's why we came as immigrants to this country: to *salir pa'*
> *alante*. We have that inspiration to always be, we always want more and
> more and more. We're never content, right? That could be a weakness

because sometimes, you know, but we have that drive that we always want more and more. And that's how my parents raised me. Uh, you know, you always want more. [Marcos, Interview I].

While he was referring to Cubans in general when he said this, he suggested that he learned this from his family. Similarly, Liliana, though she immigrated to the United States at a very young age, talked about the generational differences she perceives in Latinx people and expressed that the immigrant mentality includes certain qualities and goals. According to Liliana:

Immigrants have that a lot more, I'd say, than third generation Cubans, I guess. Resilience. We were the ones that come here now. Our parents, they went through whatever they had to go through in our countries, and they said, "You better get a law degree, or you better be a doctor." You know, there's high hopes, there's high ambitions. [Liliana, Interview I].

For Marcos and Liliana, going through the immigration experience with their families meant that they had the same aspirations and the same goals for bettering themselves. Directly or indirectly, their families encouraged them to pursue the plethora of opportunities available to them in the United States.

All of my participants reflected on lessons learned from their families and on how their families encouraged them to be successful. My participants recounted family stories that influenced them in pursuing opportunities and goals. They also described instances in which their families specifically encouraged them to be successful. This relates to aspirational capital in Yosso's (2005) work on community cultural wealth, as she notes that aspirational capital is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). Some of my participants described difficulties that their families and sometimes they surpassed, as well as how these motivated them to be successful. Yosso suggests that this type of capital includes moving

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beyond one's present situation and having children reach goals that their parents could not. My participants' narratives also reflect the encouragement provided by their families to *superarlos* and go beyond what they had achieved.

Values Passed on through Family

In addition to the overall influence of my participants' families, the family stories told by my participants also reflected a wealth of cultural lessons and values that they used in the application process for nationally competitive awards and that they carry with them in higher education and in life in general. Some of these values are values common in Latinx culture, but what is most important in my research is that they were inculcated in my participants by their families. Through experiences and teaching, my participants learned values upon which they continue to draw as they navigate their academic experiences.

The values of determination and perseverance permeated the narratives of my participants, and these had been passed on to them from their families. For instance, Joann told me a moving story of her family escaping Cuba and enduring a dangerous journey to reach the United States. This story taught her the value of taking chances and determination. Marcos also noted that his experiences of leaving Cuba and coming to the United States with his family led him to take chances and persevere, which is evident in his going back to school as a non-traditional student and applying to a prestigious award to reach his career goals. He and Daniela both indicated that they felt they needed to apply to the awards and see what happens. Isabella also spoke about determination, saying, "I think the biggest family value would be to be persistent and not give up. I think that's the biggest one." She relied on this value through application challenges, especially

in trying to obtain an affiliation from the in-country contact that would facilitate her proposed Fulbright research.

My participants also described how their families had instilled values like hard work in them. Joann, who is a student researcher and a student athlete who manages to maintain a high grade point average, mentioned that her parents instilled the lesson of hard work in her. She said,

> My mom talked to me about this. She was like, 'We have kind of like an immigrant mentality, which is like work, work, work, work, work. Like, we need to save. We need to like, make sure even if we're going to have bad times that we're prepared. [Joann, Interview I].

She described how her parents and other family members worked hard at grueling jobs when they arrived in the United States despite being professionals back in Cuba. Jorge, whose parents were members of the working class in Puerto Rico, also has a strong work ethic. Through his narrative, it is evident that he is diligent in maintaining his grades and being actively engaged in research opportunities, all while working off-campus. Daniela also noted the importance of hard work as it had been imparted by her parents:

> Being hardworking is so important because things aren't going to be delivered to you on a platter, and you have to find a way to make things work, and you don't always get to have an ideal situation, but you can make an ideal situation. [Daniela, Interview I].

Hard work, therefore, was an essential value that my participants' Latinx families passed on to them, and this formed part of their motivation in applying to nationally prestigious awards and in persisting through the application process.

In addition to these values, another value imparted by family as disclosed by my participants was self-improvement. In one way or another, all of my participants reported

having a drive for constant self-improvement. According to Daniela, her parents instilled

in her the desire to better herself, especially her father:

> My dad moved for economic reasons, like many immigrants. And he
> always had this mindset that, "I have to improve. I have to be better." He
> still has it. And the way he parents me, too. He'll tell me something like,
> "You always have to be on time. You always have to do this. Smile. Talk
> or speak loudly when you're talking to people. Don't think that they're not
> interested in you." And I think besides being a little bit annoying, I think it
> goes back to this mindset that you have to improve. You have to be the
> best version of yourself possible. And that's something I get from both my
> parents. [Daniela, Interview I].

Vanessa disclosed that her mother also promoted self-improvement, saying, "My mom is

always telling me like, 'Don't be afraid to ask questions,' you know? Like, having that

um, mentality always of like… She always kind of, like, pushed self-growth, self-

improvement." Santiago and Jorge both spoke about how they had internalized this value

and constantly sought opportunities to improve themselves. Gaby also spoke about never

being able to rest. *Elle* had planned to take a break after graduation but started selling

baked goods and ended up with an award-winning small business! These examples all

demonstrate the value of self-improvement – constantly wanting to get ahead – as passed

on by their families.

This value of self-improvement was often accompanied by families instilling the

importance of education. Liliana, for instance, spoke about how education is very much

instilled as part of Cuban culture, and her family cemented this. She said,

> I come from a family of academics. It was very much instilled in my
> family that I have to go to college. I have to afterwards get a job, and
> whatever I wanted to do after, I- They always told me that whatever
> you're going to do in life, you just have to be the best at. That was very
> much, like, drilled into my head. So, I never doubted for a second that I
> was going to go to college. [Liliana, Interview I].

Education was also important in Isabella's family, as her mother had a graduate degree and was a teacher for students with special needs. Isabella noted that seeing her mother's work taught her the importance of education but also the value of inclusive education. This even informed her Fulbright project proposal. Though Vanessa's parents did not have the opportunity to go to college, they also taught her the value of education and encouraged her to go to school so that she could obtain a good job – a government job, which is what her mother hoped for her. They even enrolled in a family mentoring program so that they would learn how to prepare for and navigate the college experience. Jorge had also learned to value education through his family. He told me a story about his grandfather in Puerto Rico who owned a store and had designed a few bridges. Though the whole family thought the grandfather had gone to school, Jorge had recently learned that he had not. Jorge suggested that this encouraged him to keep studying because, "If he made it so far without an education, in my opinion, I think that then with education, I can achieve a lot more." Education, therefore, was a key value that was tied to self-improvement in many of my participants' families.

Six of my participants spoke about how faith and religion were part of their upbringing, as these tend to be important in Latinx culture, and most of these participants reflected on relying on the faith lessons passed on through their families. Joann disclosed a story about her grandmother holding onto her Catholic faith fervently in Cuba, and though her parents did are not very religious, they still hold on to some of those values and passed them along to her. Faith was often important in overcoming adversity. Marcos, for instance, spoke about challenges he had in the application process and beyond, and he noted that his faith was essential in getting him through this: "I built that

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connection with God. So, it's just like, I have that confidence that I could overcome anything. Vanessa's family says that there is "*un angelito*," a little angel, helping her. Jorge and Isabella spoke about prayer. Jorge said, "Growing up in a Catholic family, uh, helped me with many things. Sometimes, like when I'm overwhelmed, I just stop. And I'm like, 'Okay, God, I need some help.' Um, and it does, um, it relaxes me." Isabella, who is Catholic, mentioned praying a lot when she faced a challenge with her Fulbright application. Her family had passed this value on to her, and she said, "When you have a problem and your parents are like, '*Déjaselo a Dios*.' You know, you leave it in God's hands." For these participants, having a cultural foundation of faith helped them cope with some of the challenges they faced.

In addition to these values promoted by their families, a few of the participants spoke about *refranes* or sayings that were important to them in the application process for prestigious scholarships but also overall. In describing linguistic capital, Yosso (2005) indicates that *dichos* or proverbs are a way of communicating culture. *Refranes* are common in Spanish dialog – Liliana said, "We use those expressions all the time!" – and a central way of "imparting a lesson," as my participant Daniela noted. My participants mentioned several *refranes* that they reflected on during the application process for prestigious awards. Marcos, for example, spoke in Spanglish at several points in his interviews and brought up *refranes* that he felt he needed to use in order to be true to himself. In discussing his plans if selected as a Boren recipient and how to manage any unexpected expenses, he said that it would be difficult but, "*Yo me cuelo por un alfiler*." The literal translation is that he will squeeze through the eye of a needle, but the saying means that he will make it happen.

Two of my participants reflected on *refranes* that were particularly useful in motivating them through the application process. Marcos discussed having faith that things happen for a reason, and the *refrán* reflecting this was, "*Lo que sucede, conviene.*" While he was making plans in case he was awarded the Boren Scholarship, he suggested that he would accept the results no matter what. Thanks to her language education, Daniela was especially perceptive to the importance of *refranes* in Latinx culture and discussed the following:

> My mom always says… Well, it's funny. I say that my mom says it, but I realize that every Hispanic mom says the same thing! So, she always says, "*La historia no fue escrita por cobardes.*" So, every time the application process got tough and every time I wanted to give up and quit, I'd remember that – history wasn't written by cowards – and I'd push through. [Daniela, Interview II].

Because the award applications are lengthy and sometimes pose challenges for applicants, this *refrán* that Daniela's mother repeated to her helped her persist in the application process. Imparting cultural values through r*efranes*, therefore, was yet another way that my participants' families were influential in their application processes.

My participants indicated that certain cultural values were important to them as they applied to nationally prestigious awards. The role of the family was evident in the narratives of my participants, as they learned those values through their families. Families inculcated the participants with important cultural lessons and values such as hard work, determination, self-improvement, and faith. Some of these were passed along in the form of *refranes* or sayings, which are very common in Latinx culture. In Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, these all make up familial capital, includes cultural knowledge and formation of values that we learn from our families and our communities.

All of these were part of the capital that my participants drew upon during their award

application processes, as well as throughout their educational careers.

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Family Support

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While my participants reported benefitting from the encouragement of their

families and the formation of the values that they learned from them, they often also

received support from family members who may not have been as familiar with the

award applications or processes. The participants suggested that their families provided

them with different levels of support, from emotional support to giving them advice about

their applications. Others noted that their families were hesitant about their plans at first

and that they had to educate them about the awards and how they could bring about

future opportunities. Nonetheless, the support that my participants' families provided to

them impacted their application experiences for nationally prestigious awards.

Several of the participants described their families as being supportive overall of

their decisions to apply for these awards. Jorge, for instance, talked about how his parents

were focused on the end goal for him while supporting his projects along the way,

especially because he is a non-traditional student. He said, "They're not the type of

person that's going to be, like, very involved in what I do. They just focus on

encouraging me to finish and continue doing great stuff." Likewise, Daniela described

both of her parents as being encouraging despite not understanding what the award was

all about, and she focused on her mother as being particularly supportive:

> And when she heard about Fulbright, she said, "I think this will be a good
> thing for you, not only personally but academically, and it could lead to
> professional success. And you have to do it. And no matter what the
> outcome is, I'm always going to be here for you. And if you need anything
> for the application process," like, she didn't know if it costs anything. It

doesn't, but at the time, she's like, "If you need anything, I'm here for you." [Daniela, Interview I].

Santiago also expressed that his parents and siblings were all supportive, though he mentioned that his siblings were not as "in the loop" with what he was doing. In addition to having their family's emotional support like the other participants, Gaby's and Joann's parents also reviewed their application essays, providing them with constructive feedback in the application process.

My participants described being able to count on their families for support as they applied to these prestigious awards, even if their families may not have been as supportive of their plans initially. Throughout their narratives, Gaby, Joann, and Daniela reflected on the constant emotional support that they receive from their parents. When I asked *elle* about strengths that *elle* had in the application process, Gaby mentioned being passionate about the work *elle* does and,

> Another advantage I would say is like the family support that I had because my family is very, um, like, even though like they do say, "Oh, why are you applying to this?" Like, at the end of the day, they do like support me, and like, they want me to be happy. So, they help me the best they can. [Gaby, Interview I].

Joann also shared that her parents were a source of unconditional support: "I think the way they raised me to be like, 'You can do anything, especially like, if you set your mind to it,' you know? And like, 'If you need any help, we're here, you know? You're not doing it alone.'" Joann described consulting her parents on major decisions like applying for Fulbright. In a similar way, Daniela said of her mother: "She's my biggest supporter. So, for her, she thinks I'm capable of taking on the world, and sometimes she believes in

myself when I don't." For Gaby, Joann, and Daniela, parents were the primary sources of support.

Other participants mentioned relying on support from siblings in addition to parents. For Daniela, both of her parents and her sister cheered her on throughout her academic career and celebrated her triumphs. Marcos described being close to his sister, and though she has always been supportive of him, Marcos disclosed that she is going through difficult times. He told her about his Boren application, but he acknowledges that, "I'm sure that if it wasn't because of her health, she would have reacted in such a different way," and that she would have motivated him more through the process. Jorge also reflected on the strong bond that he has with his sister:

> My sister is my number one fan. She's always, like, encouraging, but she,
> I mean– She obviously encourages me, but she, again, she also goes with
> the flow, and she's like, "You're doing great!" Sometimes if I feel
> overwhelmed, she's the one that is like, "Don't worry." And she tries to
> find solutions to what's happening. [Jorge, Interview II].

Santiago, Gaby, and Isabella also described similar support that they received from their parents and siblings, suggesting that family is a central part of my participants' support networks.

Three of my participants also spoke about support received from members of their extended families. Latinx families often embrace members that are not biologically related to them but still form part of the family (Yosso, 2005), and a few of my participants talked about how these individuals are part of their support network. For instance, Vanessa spoke about her mother's friend, "practically like a cousin," who was visiting from Colombia when she was working on her Boren application. She helped ease some tensions and keep the joviality of Colombian culture alive in Vanessa's home.

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Daniela described spending time with her godmother in Argentina and learning family stories from her that taught her important life lessons. Santiago also talked about the host families he had from previous programs he had participated in and reflected on how they continue to be an important part of his support network. Families and extended families were essential to my participants for support and for exemplifying key cultural values upon which they relied.

Despite having families that were overall supportive, several of my participants explained that their families did not know about or understand the award or even see why they wanted to go abroad, and this was often tied to culture. For example, Isabella mentioned,

> I think for my family, they were happy, but they were kind of scared. Like, 'You're going to Latin America? For nine months?' [We both laugh]. I think, yeah. I think it's very common in the Latino culture. Like, why are– They don't understand why you want to leave. [Isabella, Interview I].

Gaby also described having parents that were hesitant at first: "Honestly, like, my parents like did not want me to go. [We both laugh]. Like, every time I applied to an internship, they're like, 'Why are you doing this? What, what– Do you not love us?' It's a Hispanic thing." According to Jorge, his parents did not want him to leave because they were concerned about his health and safety in his proposed host country. "Very Latino parents," he said, and he described how he spoke to them about the realities of different parts of that country. "I had to go through the whole shebang, everything in detail, even though I was 30." Cultural norms seemed to be connected to how my participants' families felt about their applications to nationally prestigious awards, especially because these awards would send them out of the country.

Several of my participants spoke about family unity and how Latinx families are family oriented and like to spend time together and support each other, which could explain their reactions to my participants' plans. Isabella noted, "We're very family oriented. We like to always be together." Gaby echoed this sentiment and said, "I think it's a Hispanic thing that we're very like family focused or family oriented. Yeah." Jorge also reflected on the importance of family in Latinx culture and mentioned that he appreciated that his host culture shared this value, as well. Though she lived on campus because she was a student athlete, Joann talked about how she enjoyed going home on the weekends to spend time with her parents and talk to them about her plans. She said, "Like, I'm just going to sit here at my dorm by myself when I could be sitting in the couch with them? And I know I made them a little bit happier just to be sitting there next to them." This important piece of Latinx culture forms part of the familial support that my participants experienced. While it may have made it difficult for my participants' families to understand why they wanted to pursue these opportunities that would take them away from the family, they mostly supported them in the end.

Furthermore, my participants spoke about how being family-oriented was an asset in their application process and for what they proposed to do abroad if awarded. Joann, for instance, mentioned that she discusses major decisions with her family and that, together, they resolve issues. Jorge also spoke about how the family unity and interconnectedness inculcated in him through his Puerto Rican culture would help him adapt to his host culture and meet new people. He suggested that his proposed host culture shared that value of unity and related to coming together, which was very familiar

to him. Furthermore, Gaby felt that being family oriented would directly impact the work

elle proposed to do abroad:

> I feel like my cultural identity definitely brings a lot of strengths in the
> sense that like, you know, I'm very family oriented because of it. Like, I
> lean on my family. I lean on my friends and I'm very, um, how do you
> say? I am very collaborative because of it, which is very important in
> research because research is a collaboration. And because of that, I feel
> like I've been able to really persevere and do great in my research. [Gaby,
> Interview II].

Being family oriented, therefore, was a significant value in the participants' families and

how they viewed the award, as well as in the participants themselves.

 While all of my participants' families provided them with some level of support,

their support did not come without the challenge of educating their families about the

awards and getting through the initial shock of the award including a component abroad.

Vanessa disclosed discussions she had with her parents in which they questioned why she

wanted to go abroad when she has everything she needs here in the United States and

doubted that she could learn anything from her host country. She said,

> I'm trying to explain to them, you know, like, what the international
> experience could mean. Like, what being fluent in three languages can
> mean, you know? Like, they get it. Like, they know it's good for me, but
> they don't really get it, you know? [Vanessa, Interview I].

Gaby attributed the feelings of hesitancy that *elle's* parents had to the Hispanic culture,

saying that they did not understand why *elle* wanted to apply to an award that would

make *elle* leave them for graduate school abroad. Liliana applied to learn Russian in

Eurasia through the Boren Scholarship, which did not go over well with her parents who

were forced to learn the language in Cuba. According to Liliana,

> They don't see why I'm so interested in this. But then again, they're also
> not like the first-generation immigrants that had to come here and become

Americanized. They had already gone through all school in Cuba. So, they don't understand why I have such a big interest in all this. [Liliana, Interview I].

For Liliana, her parents were focused on her receiving a good education, and though they were not thrilled with her decision, they are behind her. She said, "I think this all has to do with, you know, parents encouraging you to be better." Still, these conversations were often difficult for my participants to have with their families.

A couple of my participants had applied to several opportunities throughout their academic careers, but they still had to educate their parents about why their applications to these awards were important. For instance, Joann's parents wanted her to go straight to medical school and did not understand why she wanted to take a year to do research abroad through the Fulbright program. As she spoke with her mother about the prestige of the program and the possibility of them visiting her abroad, her mother began to change her mind. Joann said,

And so, she got very excited, and then she kind of slowly talked my dad into it, and now they're very excited about it… They were looking into it yesterday, and they called me very excited. They're like, "You know there are presidents that have done this? States people? Like, really big people have done this!" And I'm like, "Yeah, yeah. It's a big deal." [Joann, Interview I].

Though they always championed her initiatives, learning about the prestige of the program created an additional point of pride for Joann's parents, and they supported her. Santiago also reported having to educate his parents, especially since he has participated in several programs abroad. According to Santiago,

With the amount of things that I do, if I'm being honest, like, they can't keep track of what I'm doing. They, they kind of think it's all the same thing and they're like, "What are you doing again?" [We both laugh]. So, I always have to, like, re-explain it to them, or like just, you know, make

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something up. But most of all, what's most important is that they're very supportive. [Santiago laughs]. They're like, "Go on, you do that!" [Santiago, Interview I].

For both him and Joann, telling their families more about their plans helped them understand why they wanted to pursue these opportunities. Nonetheless, their families were supportive.

Family support was key as my participants applied for nationally prestigious awards. They reported receiving support from parents, siblings, and even members of their extended families, but backing from parents seemed to be the most influential. Still, not all of my participants had supportive families, either because they were not familiar with the awards or because they did not want them to move abroad if awarded. All in all, though, most of my participants' families were supportive of their applications and ambitions, usually after difficult conversations and education about the awards and their prestige. The support that their families gave them was a driving force in during the application experiences of my participants.

Summary

The results reported in this chapter highlight the centrality of the influence of family in the application experiences of my Latinx participants and in their lives overall. My participants retold stories of their families, including immigration stories and recounting sacrifices made by their families, and how these impacted them in persevering towards success and in seeking new opportunities. Important cultural values like determination, hard work, the drive for self-improvement, and faith were also passed on by family, and these often carried my participants through their respective award applications. Finally, support from their families was crucial to my participants, though

they described relying on this to different degrees, especially in applying to nationally prestigious awards. Though my participants benefitted from family support overall, some of their families were not as supportive of their applying to these awards, either because they would take them away from the family or because they were not familiar with the awards and the prestige and future opportunities they would bring.

These results begin to answer my first research question about how Latinx applicants for nationally competitive awards perceive the application process in relation to types of capital, and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) adds perspective. The importance of the family in my study speaks to familial capital, aspirational capital, and social capital. Familial capital comprises the support systems in families, as well as the cultural knowledge and formation of values that we learn from our families and our communities (Yosso, 2005). In addition to family support, my participants also spoke about the cultural values that they learned from their families and how these helped them through the application process and in their lives overall. The support my participants received from their families also reflects social capital in community cultural wealth, which according to Yosso includes support networks. Furthermore, my participants also described being influenced by their families' advice and the sacrifices they made for them, as well as being motivated by their family stories. According to Yosso (2005), aspirational capital is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). The desire to get ahead (*salir adelante*), whether inherent or instilled by their families, was certainly present in the narratives of my participants, and this reflects aspirational capital.

The importance of the family throughout my participants' narratives about their prestigious award application experiences, therefore, suggests that they drew upon community cultural wealth during this process. The centrality of family pointed to instances of familial capital, aspirational capital, and social capital. In addition to the support received from family, my participants relied on other networks of support during the application process, further expanding the social capital they experienced as they applied for these awards. The following chapter details these additional networks of support, which include mentors, advisors, faculty, and even peers. In it, I also recount how my participants felt that these individuals were helpful in the application process for nationally prestigious awards.

CHAPTER VI

NETWORKS OF SUPPORT

While family was the most dominant theme in my research on the experiences of Latinx applicants to nationally prestigious awards, networks of support and cultural capital also surfaced as key themes in my study. In addition to the importance of the family, my participants reflected on how other members of their social networks were influential in the application process for their respective awards. This chapter conveys the results related to these individuals, the social capital upon which my participants drew.

Throughout their interviews, my participants described drawing heavily upon their support networks during the application process for nationally competitive awards. While their families and the support and values they provided were important, my participants spoke about other individuals that provided not only emotional support throughout the process but also instrumental support in completing their applications and navigating the associated institutional processes. In this study, these networks are in line with Yosso's (2005) notion of social capital in community cultural wealth, which she describes as people and resources that provide others support in navigating institutions. More traditional theories of capital focusing on class like Bourdieu (1986) view social capital more along the lines of having the networks and contacts to continue to be successful and perpetuate the status quo and class differences, but in community cultural wealth, social capital is about support for students of color that helps them excel, including when those that have been give opportunities to thrive pay it forward. Throughout their narratives, my participants discussed receiving this kind of support from mentors, advisors, faculty, and friends and other peers.

Mentors

Seven of my nine participants expressed being thankful for having mentors throughout their academic careers who formed part of their networks of support. These mentors were administrators, former teachers, supervisors, and other individuals that guided my participants in making plans for the future. Some of these mentors were also helpful as the participants applied for prestigious awards or were influential at some part of the process. Liliana, for instance, talked about a couple of administrators in her academic program that helped her define her goals for the Boren application and beyond for her career plans in national security. She said, "When you have like a team of people who are, like, giving you advice and mentoring, it just fortifies…" Liliana also spoke about an internship supervisor who not only mentored her on career matters like working in government but who was also influential to her as she negotiated her cultural identity as a Cuban and as an American:

> I also related a lot to him because– You would think since he's an older generation Cuban that he was, like, very much part of the third generation Miami Cubans that came here in the 60s, but he's not because he was born in Cuba, went to Washington DC, didn't pass through Miami, so he doesn't really have– There's like a gap between those two cultures, and I started realizing that there's a lot of Cubans in other parts of the U.S. that aren't the same as Miami Cubans. That was just such a shock to me, but it's good because it also proved to me that I can have a Cuban identity and an American identity and that they can coexist. [Liliana, Interview I].

In her second interview, Liliana mentioned that she wrote about her cultural identity in one of her Boren application essays and said that she felt "privileged" in doing so. In Liliana's case, her mentors were influential in developing her career goals and in cementing her cultural identity, both of which were important components to her Boren

application since the award focuses on national security, cultural adaptability, and language acquisition.

Vanessa, who also applied to the Boren Scholarship, described how her mentor, an administrator whom she had met at a conference and whom she identified with because of her international experience, advised her that she should study abroad if she was interested in eventually working for the State Department:

> She said, "You know, you have to do this. You have to do a year abroad. Like, that's going to give you a huge competitive advantage above everybody." Um, and she told me about her experience abroad and then– Yeah, so she's been like my mentor throughout this entire process, which is really, really helpful, thankfully. [Vanessa, Interview I].

Her mentor worked in international education, and this advice from her was directly connected to Vanessa's decision to apply to the Boren Scholarship because she first discovered the award when researching how to fund her study abroad experience.

Mentors often provided advice and votes of confidence over the participants' academic journeys. Daniela mentioned a high school teacher who has continued to mentor her throughout the college experience and has been a resource for her in planning for her future professional studies. She consults with her when she applies to different programs and awards and sees her as a resource. According to Daniela, "I am really indebted to her for her belief in, for her belief in me. And she's also another person who things I can take on the world." Santiago also described one of his mentors – another student in a program in which he participated. Santiago has applied for several prestigious awards, and he has been awarded a few of them. Santiago and this student were the only people of color in the program,

So, we just like gravitated towards each other 'cause I guess you go towards what's like, what you're most comfortable with and so like, he– During that program, like, he was in his master's program, um, but throughout my undergrad, like, he's been a lot of, like, he's offered a lot of guidance, and I probably haven't like thanked him enough for a lot of things. Maybe I should! But he, he's definitely like done a lot. [Santiago, Interview I].

These individuals, therefore, provided guidance and support in the long term for Daniela and Santiago. At the same time, they were sounding boards for them when they decided to apply for the Fulbright program.

Mentors, therefore, formed part of my participants' social capital in the award process, particularly because of the support and dedication they provided. Joann, for instance, was a student athlete and described two individuals in the athletics department as mentors, indicating that they have always been available to her to discuss her academic plans and have even provided countless recommendation letters for her, including for her Fulbright application. During her first interview, I asked her what is important in a mentor, and she said, "Availability, um, just like interest in, like, in what's happening, in like, what you have to say and someone that's a really good listener." Joann also noted that the mentor-mentee connection and being objective are important characteristics in a mentor, and she appreciates it when mentors are honest and objective in their feedback. This constant support from mentors demonstrates that they are key parts of students' support networks when they are fortunate enough to have them.

In studying Latinx participants, I expected that cultural background would be important in a mentor, and while some participants did have a Latinx mentor like Santiago, many of my participants described other qualities that they valued in their mentors. Jorge has had two faculty mentors guiding him in his research, supporting him

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through his award application process, and helping him plan his professional future. He

spoke about how his cultural background instilled in him an appreciation for diversity,

and he indicated that having his mentors share his cultural background is not what is most

important:

> Well, I don't know other people, but for me that doesn't matter. Coming
> from a little Island where people are different, and having the type of
> family that I have that is very supportive, happy, and lovable, allowed me
> when I moved to the U.S. to want to learn about other ethnicities,
> communities. And I don't know… I have always been very focused, and I
> have learned to love to work [with] and know about other communities,
> uh, all over the world. And I think that the U.S. is a perfect place at least
> to start, uh, because of the diversity that we have in the country. But, um,
> no, I don't think, uh, for me at least, it doesn't matter if it's Latino, Black,
> Asian, Indian, British, whatever, you know? Uh, what matters to me is
> that, uh, the mentor has patience – because we all learn in different ways –
> and is supportive and can communicate. [Jorge, Interview I].

Similarly, Isabella discussed having several mentors throughout her life, depending on

what she was pursuing at the time. When asked if it's important that her mentor share her

cultural background, she said,

> I think that would help, but that's not necessary. I think what's important
> is to have a mentor that really believes in you, right? It doesn't matter how
> they look like. I will say, like, my best mentors have been the one in
> Puerto Rico, but he is actually from the U.S. He wasn't Puerto Rican. He
> was a white male, and he is one of the persons that has helped me the
> most, and he was an, he was an amazing mentor 'cause he truly believed
> in me, right? I think like if it looks like you, then it's like more inspiring
> maybe but not necessarily. I think what's important about your mentor is
> that he or she really believes in you. [Isabella, Interview I].

For Joann, Jorge, and Isabella, then, availability, objectivity, patience, and support were

more important in mentors than their cultural background.

In addition to qualities like patience and being supportive, professional

background was helpful in mentors. Vanessa, for example, had a mentor who was an

international educator supporting her goals of studying abroad through the Boren

Scholarship. Daniela's former teacher taught her English and had experience with legal

studies, so Daniela could discuss her current studies and future plans for law school with

her. Liliana also suggested that sharing a field with her mentors was more important than

sharing a cultural background. Since she applied to the Boren Scholarship and is

interested in a career in national security, she said the following when asked if cultural

background was important in her mentors:

> Culturally, no, but the government has a big job culture. So as far as the
> job culture, yes, they're very helpful because they helped me see what it
> means to work for government agencies or what it would mean in the
> future, and working in the corporate field is completely different than
> working in the government field. I mean, what you say, how you talk, who
> you talk to, what you wear, you know, what you do, how to network, how
> to write. That's pretty much the culture they're trying to instill in us.
> [Liliana, Interview I].

For these three participants, professional field and academic background were more

important than cultural background in their mentors in the application process and

beyond.

My participants' mentors were administrators, faculty, supervisors, and

sometimes even other students. Throughout my participants' narratives, these individuals

provided support and advice, and some even played active roles in their application

processes by serving as references and writing recommendation letters. While some of

these mentors shared cultural backgrounds with them, my participants were more focused

on the availability, guidance, and support that these mentors provided them. Because of

the encouragement and help they provided to my participants, they became key members

of the networks making up their social capital in the application process for prestigious awards and the higher education experience overall.

Institutional Award Advisors

In addition to the support received from mentors, seven of my nine participants expressed relying on the institutional advisors for the awards to which they applied. These individuals are faculty or staff members employed at the institution that are designated as the institutional representative for the award. They usually receive specialized training on the application and awarding process by the awarding organization for the scholarship or fellowship. Applying to nationally competitive awards is not an intuitive process, as the applications involve many steps and often require interviews and academic recommendation letters. While this process may come naturally to students possessing traditional forms of social and cultural capital in relation to these awards, students from minoritized backgrounds relied on their own networks of support. Yosso (2005) notes that the support provided through social capital can be emotional or instrumental, and as narrated in their stories, my participants received instrumental support on applying to prestigious awards from largely from campus award advisors. Because the application processes for nationally competitive awards are so involved, most of the participants reported that their campus award advisors were helpful in navigating the process.

Since I was the campus advisor for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program until recently, five of the participants mentioned using me as a resource during the application process. For instance, Joann chuckled when I asked her about anyone that was helpful in the application process and said,

So, you're like, the advisor for this. So, okay, like I used Susy as the advisor for the Fulbright... So more or less like all those resources, like reading through my papers, like, and my personal statements has mainly been you and my parents. Like, that's who I really worked with about it. [Joann, Interview I].

Isabella also worked closely with me as the institutional award advisor and had a similar response when I asked her about resources that she had been used in the application process. Smiling, she said, "I, um, used you." She went on to discuss the essay writing process and how the campus writing center and I were helpful to her in this. Since the applications for several nationally prestigious awards were managed in the education abroad office until recently, and Santiago said the following:

Of course, when I came to FIU, uh, we had the study abroad office there, and everyone in the office was a lot of help as well, especially with, um, giving me feedback and giving me more information on the different kinds of awards and what other options I had available to me. [Santiago, Interview I].

In addition to Fulbright, Santiago had applied to other prestigious awards in the past, so he reflected on how the institutional advisor for these awards were helpful to him.

Other participants who applied to Fulbright spoke about the overall instrumental help the campus award advisor provided to them throughout the application process. Daniela focused on the advice I gave her in preparing this type of application:

Um, not because you're here but you haven't been really helpful during the process! [Daniela laughs]. Because I had no idea what I was doing, and you always said you have to start the application early. You can always return to it. And that's so true because there's so many sections to it, and I think I sent you so many emails, and you were very helpful with all of them, and I know you met with me to review my application before submitting it and kind of guided me, and I knew what I was walking into for the Fulbright committee interview. And you've been very helpful throughout the process. I think you have been the most helpful individual in terms of the specific information about the, the scholarship. [Daniela, Interview I].

Jorge also spoke about how the campus award advisor guides students in navigating the application process for awards like Fulbright.

> When it comes to the application process, it was just you helping me. Uh, helping navigating the website, uh, knowing deadlines, uh, doing the, the interview with you. Uh, what else? Um, yeah, making sure that every step was completely completed. [Jorge, Interview I].

For the Fulbright U.S. Student Program applicants, the advisor reviewed the applicants' essays and provided instrumental advice during the application process, including connecting them to resources for improving their applications and obtaining supplemental application materials.

Applicants to the Boren Scholarship also appreciated the support and technical assistance provided by the institutional advisor for that award. For instance, Vanessa spoke about how the campus advisor helped her develop a solid plan for the application by going through a checklist with her, but she was particularly thankful for his help with her application essays. She said,

> And then, like, of course [the advisor] helped me a lot too with the Boren award application. Like, I also look at him kind of as a mentor… I spent so many hours working on my first draft and when I went, [the advisor] was like all of his feedback, and I'm like, 'Okay!' And like, I knew that the essay needed help, but I was like, 'Wow!' And then after that, I spent less time working on my essays, like through his like help, I spent less time, but they're like way more rich. So, like, that made me feel more confident that everything was able to kind of like fluently able to come out. Like as I was writing the first time, I was like really trying, like, I don't know, it was just, like, it just didn't work. And so yeah, I was really happy to have that advising, you know, like your job, [the advisor's] job - makes a big difference for students. So, thank you! [Vanessa, Interview I].

Marcos, a non-traditional student who applied to the Boren Scholarship in order to fulfill one of his career goals of working for the federal government, also appreciated the instructions and encouragement he received from his award advisor, saying,

> I sat down with [the advisor] twice and then I'm like, "Okay, I got this." I just needed him to open my eyes a little bit more and do a little bit of *escavando* - digging. Definitely. He's a great person, definitely. But, um, nothing that I… he gave me that empowerment to pretty much, you know, this is what they're looking for, take off with it. [Marcos, Interview I].

The advisor for the Boren Scholarship, therefore, was also part of the applicants' social capital, providing indispensable support as they applied for the award.

Gaby, who applied to the Rhodes and Marshall Scholarships, described the support that *elle* received from the campus award advisor on the Marshall application specifically, since students are not able to receive feedback on their Rhodes applications per the stipulations of that award. These awards, among the oldest and most prestigious, involve lengthy applications and different rounds of interviews. According to Gaby,

> So [the advisor] helped me a lot. Um, like I gave her like the Marshall application and she like reviewed it and gave me the okay… Um, she helped me kind of like brainstorm who I could, like, ask [for reference letters] and like who would be like the best people to, you know, help with my application. [Gaby, Interview I].

This was especially important because these awards require multiple recommendations and several rounds of review, and Gaby suggested that the advisor for these awards provided helpful feedback in the application process. In the second interview I had with *elle*, Gaby reflected on how "[the advisor] did help me with Marshall, which consequently sort of helped me with Rhodes, too," as the skills *elle* acquired in preparing the Marshall application facilitated work on the Rhodes application.

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The other two participants in my study did report working with the campus award advisor for their respective awards, but they relied more heavily on their own agency and on other members social networks during the application process. In her first interview, Liliana said that she reached out to the campus award advisor, but she described herself as independent and spoke more about doing "definitely a lot of research" in finding a program in her proposed host country to which she could apply the Boren award. In applying to the Fulbright award, Santiago noted that he worked with me as the institutional advisor. Nonetheless, having applied to several awards throughout his academic career, he depended more on his peer network of other awardees during the application process and asked them for "brutal honesty" on his essays. In his first interview, I told Santiago that this process was effective because his essays were very strong when I read them. He laughed and said, "Yeah, they had been through a lot." In addition, though the campus award advisors were not integral in the application experiences of Liliana and Santiago, these individuals were still involved in the process for them, as both Boren and Fulbright applications have institutional endorsements.

The process of applying to nationally competitive awards can be daunting, especially if the applicants are not familiar with the process. In my study, campus award advisors provided instrumental support in completing the many steps of the application processes for these awards. From giving advice about recommendation letters to reviewing essays and helping applicants set up application checklists, the institutional award advisors were part of my participants' networks and formed part of their social capital in the application process.

Faculty

In addition to having supportive mentors and award advisors, my participants also recounted how faculty members had been helpful to them either in navigating the challenges of higher education or in the award application process itself. Daniela mentioned taking advantage of faculty office hours to clarify questions she had, and Marcos described how a professor helped him address an issue with an assignment on the university's learning management system. In terms of the award applications, faculty guided students in the projects they would pursue if awarded, encouraged them to apply for these awards, served as references, and sometimes did all of these. In some cases, however, my participants were not comfortable approaching their professors, which made it difficult for them to obtain the recommendation letters required for their prestigious awards applications.

Four out of the nine participants had experience working with faculty members on research initiatives, and the experience and guidance offered by these professors were helpful to my participants in their applications to nationally competitive awards. Isabella, for example, was conducting graduate-level research under the supervision of a faculty member when she applied to the Fulbright program, and this research was a basis for her proposed Fulbright project. Isabella said that she told her professor that she was applying to the Fulbright program but did not have them review her application materials, instead relying on other resources. Gaby had been involved in several research opportunities over the years, and *elle* noted that the faculty with whom *elle* did research offered academic advice and even facilitated other opportunities, including the one where *elle* "started to fall in love with immunology," central to the plans *elle* had for the Rhodes and Marshall

awards. The experiences fostered by these faculty were influential in the plans and proposals for Isabella's and Gaby's award applications.

For two of the participants, their study abroad faculty directors were instrumental in their research and award proposals. Joann mentioned participating in several research opportunities, including expanding research she had started on a study abroad program with a faculty member who is very prominent in her field. This professor helped spark her interest in biological research, providing a foundation for her proposed Fulbright research, and she also provided one of the recommendations for Joann's Fulbright application. In a similar way, Jorge had been doing research with two faculty members from his study abroad program, and they encouraged him to apply to Fulbright to continue this research abroad, reviewed his statements for his application, and provided recommendation letters for his application. According to Jorge,

> I consider [professor] and [professor] top professors. Um, and knowing that they're top professors helping me and taking the time to, um, wanting me to be better? It's definitely, it's definitely something that, uh, that I have experienced that, um, makes me want, like, it makes me want more. [Jorge, Interview II].

For Joann and Jorge, their study abroad faculty guided them as researchers, which was key in their Fulbright plans.

Two of my participants had faculty that were particularly encouraging. In addition to being grateful to his professors for helping him develop as a researcher, Jorge said that "[My professors] drew out my future, basically. They're like, 'No, you're doing this.' And I've been going with the flow, and it has been amazing." These professors have continued to provide him with guidance into his graduate program, and in his second interview, Jorge joked that, "Oh my God. My professors text me. They just don't email

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me," suggesting that he had formed a strong bond with these professors. Santiago also described having faculty that were encouraging, even though he also revealed that he was hesitant at first to as for recommendation letters. According to Santiago, "There's definitely some teachers that are very, you know, are trying to like help students, like, put themselves out there more." In fact, in addition to providing several recommendation letters, Santiago mentioned that one of his professors motivated him to apply to a doctoral program at an Ivy League institution. For Jorge and Santiago, these faculty members were important parts of their social capital in applying to nationally prestigious awards and in their academic journeys overall.

The nationally competitive scholarships and fellowships to which my participants applied all require recommendation letters. Moreover, because of their prestige, some prefer that the recommendations come from academic references. Though she reported being uncomfortable asking faculty for recommendations, Daniela understood the importance of selecting references: "I knew specifically who I wanted to ask because it was pertinent to my application." Liliana understood the importance of "networking," especially for a national security award like Boren, and she asked faculty with experience in that field. My participants that had been involved in research were able to obtain recommendations from those professors. For Joann and Jorge, the fact that these faculty led their study abroad programs also allowed them to attest to their cultural adaptability, as being awarded Fulbright would mean that they would conduct research abroad for an extended period of time. Gaby had to provide several recommendation letters in applying to the Rhodes and Marshall scholarships, and *elle* decided that the faculty with whom *elle* had done research would be strong references: "I reached out to basically, like, all my

research mentors, um, for the letters, um, and… It worked out just fine." These participants were able obtain recommendation letters appropriate for their applications.

While all of my participants relied on their professors at some point in the application process, some were not as likely to approach faculty for guidance or even references. For example, Vanessa, who is a first-generation student, said that she was not comfortable going to her professors because she had been taught that there was a divide between students and faculty:

> 'Cause like, I always grew up with– Like, you need to have a lot of respect for, you know, professors here. Like, I've never really been able to cross that border. Like, I always noticed some people are very natural and like, become best friends with professors. Like, I could never. [Vanessa, Interview I].

In a similar way, Daniela expressed trepidation in asking her faculty for recommendation letters for her Fulbright application:

> I'm not used to asking for professors for recommendations. I don't have anyone who has experience knowing how to ask for recommendations. I have people who know how to write work emails, but it's not the same thing as asking a professor for a recommendation because you need to first explain what it is for and what about their class– Like, why are you choosing them– I knew specifically who I wanted to ask because it was, I think it was pertinent to my application. [Daniela, Interview I].

Daniela described this as one of the biggest challenges she faced in the application process. In fact, she mentioned that she had not applied to other prestigious awards in the past because they required too many recommendation letters.

Despite having applied to a number of prestigious awards and programs in the past, Santiago also disclosed being hesitant in asking faculty for recommendations:

> I don't know if it's just because of being a person of color in higher education, but even when applying to grad school or to these programs, I would still feel nervous about reaching out to professors that have helped

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me in the past to ask for a recommendation, because I would think that I was, you know, being a burden to them or like asking for too much. [Santiago, Interview II].

Like Vanessa and Daniela, Santiago also experienced a level of hesitance in approaching faculty for references. He expressed wishing he had spent more time at the institution in order to get to know faculty better because he was a transfer student and had spent two semesters abroad. Nonetheless, he said that,

I had a few teachers that, um, luckily, I don't know how, but I like stood out to them in a way during that one year... [Santiago laughs]... uh, that I've been able to like talk to and they've been quite helpful. [Santiago, Interview I].

These faculty members also provided Santiago with recommendation letters for his application to Fulbright and other programs. In situations like these, seeking recommendations was a significant challenge in the application process, but my participants were able to overcome it.

While some of the participants were hesitant to approach their professors for recommendations or other advice, faculty were instrumental in the application processes of many of the participants. Some of the participants also reported that faculty served as sounding boards for them and helped them manage difficulties in the college experience. From supervising the research that contributed to their applications to writing recommendation letters, faculty provided support and guidance in the application process for prestigious awards and also formed part of the social capital of my participants.

Friends and Peers

All of my participants were influenced one way or another by the level of support that they received from their friends and peers as they decided to apply to nationally

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prestigious awards and persisted throughout the process. They described their support

from friends on a spectrum from complete support to not understanding why they wanted

to do this and criticizing their decisions. Other peers such as significant others and fellow

students were also often powerful driving forces. All in all, the support these individuals

provided, or lack thereof, tended to serve as motivators for my participants during their

application processes.

In their narratives, five of my nine participants related that their friends were a

source of emotional support during their application processes. Gaby and Vanessa said

that their friends were very excited for them when they told them about their decisions to

apply for prestigious awards. In fact, speaking about friends who are supportive, Gaby

shared:

> They inspire me with their work, just being present and also, like, sharing
> my own passions. Like, I think that's definitely some inspiration as well.
> Like, just by having the same interest in showing you that, like, you know,
> we can get it through together. [Gaby, Interview II].

Liliana also spoke about enjoying her friends' support, saying, "My friends are good for

support, not mentors, but I do talk to them and they're like, 'Yeah. Yeah. That's good!

I'll back you up on that!'" Daniela reported having significant encouragement from her

friends, calling them her "cheerleaders" and saying that she confided in them "because

sometimes I needed to unwind and, and just get support. And sometimes they understand

what it's like, and they understand what it's like to go through deadlines." As a first-

generation student, Daniela felt that her family did not understand exactly what she was

doing, but her friends were familiar with application processes, even if they were not

familiar with Fulbright. In a similar way, Santiago described having a solid network of

friends who support him both emotionally and instrumentally. These experiences told my participants suggest that having support friends was important as they applied to prestigious awards.

In addition to emotional support from friends, two of my participants also related in their narratives that their significant others encouraged them during the application process. Vanessa, for example, spoke about receiving support from her boyfriend, even though he is also a non-traditional student and was not too familiar with prestigious awards. She said that he knew the award was important to her and would help to keep her focused: "He'll tell me, like, 'Go work on your essays… Like, you're procrastinating… You got to do it!" Joann also reported having a supportive boyfriend. Though she spoke with him about her decision to apply and ran ideas by him, perhaps more importantly, he was supportive of her plans to spend time abroad to conduct her research. She said,

> We've been together for really long and, like, we both see a future with each other, but there's no point in limiting each other… So, he's going to be going to law school, and I'm going to be on the other side of the world, [Joann knocks on the wooden desk] hopefully. [Joann, Interview I].

Both Vanessa and Joann had been with their partners for several years, and they appreciated the support that they received from them. Gaby, on the other hand, reflected on having a partner that seemed to be supportive at first but really was not, but *elle* persevered and had the support of other friends in the process.

For one of my participants, friends and peers were influential in more direct ways, providing instrumental support in addition to emotional support. In his first interview, Santiago talked about a peer network that motivated him and helped him in the process: "I would say I have a few different communities. Like it's, it's quite, um, I don't know...

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it, it makes me feel like happy when I think about it 'cause like, I have these groups of different people that I can rely on, um, for different things." In fact, he said that he did not even want to apply to Fulbright until a friend encouraged him to do so. During the application process, they provided instrumental guidance. Santiago said,

> I reached out to some friends that I knew didn't know exactly what I was doing. Um, 'cause I wanted their like fresh perspective. I would just bounce off ideas to them and like explain to them my portfolio. I let them see my grant proposal and asked them if that made sense to them because even though they're not, so even if they weren't so familiar with like the topic, if the grant proposal was clear, anyone should be able to understand it. So, I had people that weren't familiar with that, like, read it. Um, and then of course I reached out to some friends that are actually very familiar and are at Peace Corps, and you know, did the same thing but this time with people that were more informed with the topic. [Santiago, Interview I].

Santiago expressed being very appreciative of this support network, mostly made up of other students of color that had excelled academically and in other prestigious opportunities. These peers made up a significant part of his social support network and therefore his social capital.

Similarly, three of my participants described receiving support and information from alumni of prestigious awards. In Santiago's case, he had been planning to apply to the Fulbright award for several years after learning about it from award alumni he met through a program he participated in during high school:

> So, the first time I learned about Fulbright and Boren were from the program that I did in high school because a lot of the alumni from that program, they went on to do Fulbright. They went on to do CLS, um, all sorts of things. I kind of saw what they were doing, and I had an idea, um, of where I wanted to go personally. So, when I went into college, I kind of had, like, this action plan already, uh, what I wanted to do, um, who I need to talk to, and where to go from in order to reach these goals, [Santiago, Interview I].

Liliana and Joann also described learning about prestigious awards from award alumni and being inspired to apply thanks to the accounts of their experiences. Liliana learned about the Boren award from a program alumna in her fellowship. She said, "I found the program because of the fellowship I'm in right now. We have a previous, um, a student who did it. She's also my TA for another class. She said she had a great experience, and she said, 'Well, you should all apply!'" Similarly, Joann heard about Fulbright from another student in a summer research program. She had received Fulbright to teach English abroad before going to medical school, and Joann realized that she wanted to do something similar but doing research. For these three participants, award alumni were an important part of their social networks, promoting award awareness and even demonstrating that it is feasible for them to win these awards.

Supportive friends did not form part of the narratives of all of my participants, though. A couple of participants did not discuss their decision to apply or go into too much detail with their friends at all. For example, Joann disclosed that she did not talk about her Fulbright application much to her friends and instead discussed it mostly with her parents, her boyfriend, and the institutional award advisor. In a similar way, Isabella said,

> I don't even tell people too much other than the people that are correcting my essay that I'm going to apply to it. Like, my friends don't know that I'm applying to this or I don't, I don't like to showcase it to the world like... 'I'm going to apply to this.' I just, um, pretty much keep it to myself. [Isabella, Interview I].

She added that, "It's always been just me wanting to do this." For Isabella, her own drive and her belief in herself and in her proposed project propelled her to persist in the application process and seek out the resources to help her build strong application. In

these cases, not relying on supportive friends during the application process was not a challenge for Joann and Isabella because they had other sources of support.

Three of my participants revealed that their friends apprehensive or even criticized their decisions to apply to their respective awards. Some of Jorge's friends wondered why he wanted to go abroad at all, and he said that they were worried because they had negative misconceptions about his proposed host country. However, this did not deter him: "I wouldn't even pay attention, but they were a little… they were worried about safety and, uh, me being alone." Since Jorge had spent a long period of time in his host location previously, he was familiar with it and not concerned. Isabella said also her friends were worried that she would be gone for such a long time and thought it was "crazy" that she was planning to pursue research abroad for such a long time. Like Jorge, she persisted on her own despite not necessarily having support from friends.

Marcos, on the other hand, mentioned that his friends had a strong negative reaction to his plans. He said that he had lost many friends just in his decision to go back to school later in life and that they had even stronger opposition to his career goals of working for the federal government. He reflected on this experience as follows:

> You lost so many friends, and now you're going to drop out of school and you're not going to make it happen? It's just that, like, you have to be that mature enough to say, "You know what? If this is what it takes to make it happen, whatever it takes!" [Marcos, Interview II].

In Marcos' case, this lack of support helped him remain focused persisting towards his degree, as well as on how the Boren scholarship could facilitate his future career goals. For him, like for Jorge and Isabela, not having unconditional support from friends did not

discourage them from pursuing their goals and often motivated them to continue doing so.

Though the results were mixed in terms of having supportive friends and peers, these individuals formed part of my participants' networks, and therefore, their social capital. Friends were important sources of emotional support, helping my participants persist through application processes that were unfamiliar and sometimes daunting. In addition to emotional support, friends and peers sometimes provided instrumental support in reviewing applications. A couple of participants also reported having supportive partners. Moreover, other peers like alumni of prestigious award programs were key in informing some of my participants about these awards, and they also showed them that the awards are not so far out of reach. Nonetheless, three of my participants disclosed that their friends had not been supportive, though this did not deter them from their plans and sometimes motivated them more. In the end, the results indicate that friends and peers were often important members of my participants' support networks and the social capital upon which they relied on during the award process for nationally competitive awards.

Summary

My participants' networks of support were critical in providing both emotional and instrumental support as they applied for nationally competitive awards. Mentors provided advice and encouragement to my participants and sometimes helped them see how these awards fit into their journeys. Institutional award advisors were also helpful in the application process, as applying to these awards can be a long and confusing process. These award advisors guided the participants in completing all the steps in their applications and provided important feedback along the way. Though not all of my

participants were comfortable in approaching faculty members, faculty were key in the award application process, particularly in advising them, offering research opportunities that turned into award proposals, and providing important recommendation letters. Friends and peers also provided support for my participants, and some of these peers even inspired my participants to apply for the awards and provided feedback on their applications.

The emotional and instrumental support that my participants received from their networks of support throughout the application process for nationally prestigious awards addresses two of my research questions. My first research question is about community cultural wealth in the application process for Latinx students, and my results demonstrate that my participants heavily relied on social capital. In community cultural wealth, social capital focuses on the support networks that guide students of color in navigating institutions like higher education (Yosso, 2005), and the networks described in this chapter did this for my participants. Yosso also suggests that those who receive opportunities pay it forward and help others succeed, and this was reflected in my participants' friends and peers that inspired them to apply. On another note, my results on networks of support also answer my third research question about the resources that Latinx students describe as helpful in the application process, as all of the networks described in this chapter served as resources for my participants.

This chapter and the previous one both begin to illustrate the capital that my participants brought to their applications for nationally competitive awards, particularly in terms of family influence and networks of support. Social capital in the form of my participants' support networks were critical throughout the application process, but

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support and influence from their families were particularly significant. In terms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), these reflect social capital, familial capital, and aspirational capital. The next chapter covers the results of my study that relate to cultural capital, both positive and negative instances of it. In particular, the chapter includes the language and cultural adaptability skills that my participants brought to the application process, the resourcefulness that they used to navigate the process, and how they viewed culture as a strength in their applications.

CHAPTER VII

CULTURAL CAPITAL IN NATIONALLY PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS

In addition to the importance of the family and networks of support, culture also played a central role in the application experiences of my participants, and their narratives related how they utilized their cultural capital, though sometimes non-traditional, to navigate the application process for nationally competitive awards. Applying to nationally prestigious awards is not an intuitive process, as it involves important knowledge and experience, particularly in navigating the process. Applicants and awardees often come from privileged backgrounds and institutions (Brownstein, 2001; Pinto Alicea, 2001), and these individuals often have the cultural capital to be successful in these ventures – academic preparation, predisposition to seek out prestigious opportunities, and knowledge of how to navigate institutional processes. My study focuses on Latinx students, most of whom are first-generation students and some of whom are also non-traditional students. Nonetheless, my participants demonstrated having cultural capital in the application process for prestigious awards.

This chapter is organized into three sub-themes under the theme of Cultural Capital in Latinx Applicants to Nationally Prestigious Awards. The first sub-theme is Language and Cultural Adaptability, which includes my participants' language abilities and cross-cultural competence, as well as how this translates to cultural capital in the application process. These proficiencies, in addition to being privileged in awards that have international components and therefore value cultural adaptability, also contribute to my participants' cultural capital because they reflect that my participants are well-educated. The second sub-theme is Cultural Capital in Navigating Applications for

Nationally Competitive Awards. This sub-theme is at the crux of the chapter, as it focuses on both awareness that these awards exist and managing the application process. While these tend to be intuitive for students from privileged backgrounds, my participants are from minoritized backgrounds where they do not often the advantage of this knowledge. The final sub-theme is Counternarratives of Cultural Capital in Latinx Applicants to Prestigious Awards, and it includes the stories that my participants told during their interviews about their cultural identities, their competitiveness as applicants, and their academic experiences and credentials as related to the awards, as well as how these differ from the traditional narratives told by Latinx students. These all reflect community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in the form of linguistic capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital.

Language and Cultural Adaptability

Language skills and cross-cultural awareness are part of cultural capital (Stark, 1997, as cited in Musoba & Baez, 1997), and these competencies contribute to someone being considered well-educated. In nationally prestigious awards with international components, language ability and cultural competence would be critical to a successful application and to the participants' plans for completing their proposed work and engaging with their host cultures abroad. In considering community cultural wealth, Yosso (2005) speaks about linguistic capital, arguing that this includes adeptness in communicating across cultures and audiences, as well as the ability to recognize details and the skills associated with being multilingual. Since all of my study participants were bilingual in English and Spanish, they all exhibited strong language skills, and their narratives reflected how this related to their cultural adaptability.

Though only two of my participants applied to go to a Spanish-speaking country through nationally prestigious awards, they indicated that language skills overall would be helpful. When I asked him about whether he felt that his language skills would help him succeed abroad, Santiago replied:

> Yeah, I think, uh, being bilingual or being exposed to another language that, uh, at a higher level definitely helps you to learn other languages in the future because you're not afraid to make mistakes. And I think that's something that's so common when people are learning a language. They are so timid to speak because they don't want to make a mistake or seem– or like, you know, be perceived as like a fool or something like that. But, um, because I already knew Spanish, um, I was okay with, um, accepting the differences in a different language and going from there. [Santiago, Interview I].

Though Santiago was not applying to a Spanish-speaking country, he still felt that his language skills would allow him to adapt abroad. Similarly, Gaby applied to study in the U.K. where the language of instruction is English, but *elle* explained that being bilingual would be helpful, especially in the scientific community:

> I feel like, um, I could possibly like adapt or learn other languages too, because once you're like bilingual, you, you get like, um, more, uh, I guess leeway into like other languages. [Gaby, Interview I].

Gaby suggested that being bilingual provided adeptness at communicating, and for *elle* and for Santiago, being bilingual provided skills that could help them succeed abroad, if awarded.

Furthermore, three of my participants tied language ability to confidence. Joann suggested that knowing English, Spanish, and a little bit of French has made her attuned to nuances in communication and that this has been useful in communicating with her international teammates and research professors:

> So, I think speaking more than one language helps you just be better understood… Uh, just understanding more and I think just also being open to be wrong and being open to like, actually being right, even though when people might think you're wrong. [Joann, Interview I].

According to Joann, her language skills gave her confidence in communicating, which was especially helpful in communicating with the international faculty member with whom she was planning to collaborate for her Fulbright project. Marcos also noted that, thanks to his language skills, he had confidence to approach others and build relationships that could allow him to succeed not just in the application process but also while abroad. Confidence was also evident in Vanessa's application story, as she talked about being able to use her multilingual skills to express herself in her statements and her application overall.

The importance of language came across differently across participants as they described the application process for prestigious awards, and the way they thought about language ability depended largely on their plans for the award. Santiago, for example, applied to Fulbright to pursue graduate study in Eurasia but recognized the importance of adapting culturally:

> Like, if you learn the language, you could understand the cultural context and that's something that you don't get if you're only speaking English in a foreign place… I think, optimally, flexibility, like you're able to see like different situations in different ways. Like, I think I'm more patient because I speak different languages or when I'm trying to understand someone that may not know English or may not know Spanish or I don't understand their language quite well, I'm more patient to try to find the mutual understanding. [Santiago, Interview I].

Mutual understanding is a key component of the Fulbright program, so Santiago's reference to language ability in relation to adapting to a new culture was relevant to his application for the program. In a similar way, Liliana described language in terms of

adaptability and suggested that because of her language abilities and associated life

experiences, Boren is the perfect opportunity for her. She said:

> I've had to learn other languages throughout my life, so I don't think I
> would have a problem moving to another country and learning another
> language because I've had, I've kind of had to go through that before.
> [Liliana laughs]. And I think the best way to really learn a language is to
> be immersed in their culture. [Liliana, Interview I].

Liliana was reflecting on her experience of immigrating to the United States from Cuba

and having to learn English to adapt. For both Santiago and Liliana, therefore, language

ability would facilitate adapting to their host culture, if awarded.

Daniela also referred to adaptability, but since she had applied to teach English

through Fulbright, she also talked about how her language skills would contribute to her

effectiveness as a language teacher:

> Um, I think it would help me navigating daily life. Especially, it can be
> kind of difficult to be in an environment where you're constantly speaking
> in a language that's not your own. And sometimes, I guess, for some
> people it may feel like they're not expressing a certain part of their
> personality. Um, and whereas in my case, I feel like most facets of my
> personality are still present in Spanish… Um, I think it also helps me in
> terms of the [English Teaching Assistantship] itself. Um, I found that
> when you're, you're learning a language pronunciation's the most
> important part, and I feel like I could use Spanish phonetics to teach
> English pronunciation– Um, yeah, so that's, that's what I think the benefit
> is. And also, just knowing the mechanics of learning a language. [Daniela,
> Interview I].

Several of the participants, therefore, felt that their language skills and their adeptness at

communicating across cultures would make them strong candidates for their respective

awards. In the same vein, they sensed that their language ability would allow them to

adapt easily to their host cultures.

Language ability was not necessarily viewed as an application strength across all participants, but two of the participants reflected on how being bilingual was beneficial in other ways. Isabella discussed her uncertainty about whether being bilingual was helpful in the application process itself, but she did say that since English is not her first language, she was more likely to ask for help and feedback on her application. Nonetheless, she knew that being bilingual would help her communicate in Latin America if she was selected for a Fulbright award, especially because her project involved community outreach. Jorge, who is bilingual in English and Spanish, also felt that his language ability would not necessarily help his application to conduct research in Central Asia, but he noted that being bilingual and bicultural allowed him to embrace diversity and brought about curiosity that made him want to learn about and adapt easily to his host culture. Thus, cultural competence brought on by being bilingual was still evident even when language ability was not directly associated as an application strength.

Language ability was also important in some of the awards, depending on the countries to which the participants applied. Two of the Fulbright applicants applied to go to Spanish-speaking countries, and Spanish language proficiency was required. Since they were both fully bilingual, they easily fulfilled this requirement. The other three Fulbright applicants reported spending time studying in the countries to which they were applying or at least studying the language, so they were also able to meet their respective language requirements. While the Boren applicants had different levels of proficiency in their host languages, they all discussed their interest in improving their language skills during their interviews. Because Gaby applied to programs in the U.K., *elle* was fine with English proficiency and would easily be able to communicate in the science labs.

Therefore, my participants all expressed having the language backgrounds necessary to meet the requirements of their respective awards.

Language ability and cross-cultural awareness formed part of the cultural capital that my participants brought to the application process for the nationally competitive awards to which they applied. While each of these were present in their application experiences to varying degrees, it is important to note that language ability was related to the participants' perceptions of their ability to adapt to their host cultures if awarded, and this seemed to be true even when the participants were applying to a non-English or non-Spanish speaking country. In addition to being relevant to their awards, these competencies contribute to the cultural capital of my participants, which should translate to their being more competitive for selection.

Cultural Capital in Navigating Applications for Nationally Competitive Awards

In addition to language and cross-cultural awareness, the ability to navigate the application process for nationally competitive awards is a key component of the cultural capital that students bring to these awards. The applications for these awards are quite involved, and students from privileged backgrounds tend to have the cultural capital and the skills and knowledge to navigate these processes. Meanwhile, students from minoritized backgrounds are not always as fortunate. Nonetheless, my participants demonstrated agency in learning about the awards and in the application process overall. For many of them, their networks of support helped to mitigate the limited cultural capital that they came into the application process with, promoting award awareness and resourcefulness.

Award Awareness

The first step in applying to a nationally competitive award is knowing that it is available. Students from privileged backgrounds possess the cultural capital to be familiar with these awards and what it takes to be successful applicants (Pinto Alicea, 2001), but students from minoritized backgrounds do not always have the exposure or wherewithal to do this. While a few of my participants were fortunate enough to learn about these opportunities through their networks, the majority were not aware of these awards or the opportunities they offered. This suggests that award awareness is integral to the cultural capital of applying to prestigious awards and that students of minoritized backgrounds should be more exposed to these awards.

My three participants that were familiar with nationally competitive awards spoke about their participation in other programs of prestige that exposed them to these awards and knowing people that had applied. Isabella, for instance, was actively involved in research during her undergraduate academic program in Puerto Rico, which was funded by a scholarship offered to her by an important governmental organization. She had heard of Fulbright and had applied back then, but even she was not aware of all the possibilities that were available through the award. Liliana revealed that she participated in a fellowship program focused on national security offered through her academic department, and she learned about the Boren award through this program and through an alumna of the fellowship that had received the Boren award. Similarly, Santiago's narrative included his participation in several opportunities that had an international focus, and he planned to apply to the Fulbright program for several years since being introduced to award alumni through a program in which he participated during high

school. Though social capital was also relevant in Liliana's and Santiago's awareness of their respective awards, they and Isabella all participated in programs of distinction that afforded them the cultural capital to know about these privileged opportunities.

Unless they had heard of the programs previously or knew of individuals that had applied to nationally prestigious scholarships, my participants did not have the cultural capital to know about the offerings provided by these awards. All but one of my participants were first generation students, which limited their ability to navigate unique programs like these that require a certain degree of expertise. Despite being an accomplished student, Jorge revealed that he was not familiar with opportunities like the Fulbright program. A non-traditional student, Jorge said, "Well, like many students and people in general, I didn't know about the awards." Vanessa's experience echoed this, as she noted that she found the Boren award in looking for study abroad funding options but that she was not aware of it before then. In fact, she said that many of her faculty, even her language professors, mentioned that they were not aware of the program when she spoke to them about her plans. Even after learning about the Fulbright award, Daniela revealed that she was hesitant to apply, saying that "another part of me was scared of the prestige." While applying to these awards and being confident enough to do so comes naturally to students of more privileged backgrounds, my participants did not have this head start.

A couple of my participants went on to suggest that campuses and the award organizations need to do more to promote nationally prestigious awards, especially to groups that are less represented in these programs. According to Jorge,

> I think that universities need to get a little better when it comes to
> encouraging students to find the right mentors or the right person that is
> going to give them the right information, um, when it comes to stuff like
> this. Um, because for, at least for me, I just got lucky. [Jorge, Interview
> II].

When I mentioned to Santiago that I was pursuing this research as several prestigious award organizations were trying to expand and diversify their applicant pools, he said, "You said these programs, they're making the push for, you know, diverse people to apply, but I guess personally, like, there's definitely more that they can do." He also indicated that while he understands that scholarships and prestigious award offices tend to be small and not have many resources to promote these opportunities,

> It's kind of like– The schools that have a lot of funding are able to go and
> have targeted offices of scholarships where they identify the students and,
> like, they make them apply or, you know, just make their name known.
> But like, I don't know, it kind of seems like systematic to me at times.
> [Santiago, Interview I].

Santiago, therefore, suggested that capital was relevant in this process because institutions with more resources were more effective in disseminating information about prestigious awards. In these situations, the student's limited cultural capital in award awareness seemed to be tied to their institution's degree of award promotion.

Since prestigious awards have been historically split between various offices at Florida International University, these units were involved in independent promotion strategies for the awards. One of these was sending email messages to students introducing the awards and encouraging students to apply, and this was often the first time that students learned about these opportunities. In fact, when asked how she heard about Fulbright, Daniela said, "I think FIU sent an email. I hadn't even really heard about Fulbright before that." Jorge also heard about Fulbright from an email, but he did not

recall if it came from the university at large or if the Fulbright advisor sent an email to his faculty encouraging them to share it with their students and they referred him to the advisor. Marcos reported first learning about Boren from an email he received from an advisor in his department. Although *elle* was the only second-generation student among my participants, Gaby suggested hearing about the Rhodes and the Marshall scholarships from an email sent by the university's scholarship office, possibly an email that targeted students with strong academic performance.

In addition to emails, the campus offices that work with these awards also engaged in tabling at fairs and other events to promote them and increase awareness. Isabella's interest in Fulbright was rekindled at one of these events. She was promoting her academic program at an event and was seated next to someone that was promoting Fulbright. Isabella decided to investigate the opportunity further after this person encouraged to re-apply. As she looked into the options available, she saw a video of a researcher that shared her interests. According to Isabella, "I Googled those terms together and that's when I found out about this scholarship. When I was reading about it, I was like, 'Oh, I really want this scholarship! It sounds like the perfect thing for me!'" Liliana's interest in Boren was also fortified during a campus event. She says that she attended a session held when a Boren representative came to campus: "I was like, 'I want to go because I want to hear what he has to say.' That's when I formally decided: Okay I'm going to apply! And I started the application." These recruitment events allowed students to further explore the possibilities afforded by applying to prestigious awards.

Being aware of nationally prestigious awards is an integral part of the cultural capital in applicants to nationally prestigious awards, and the majority of my participants

were not familiar with the awards as first-generation students and students of minoritized backgrounds. While some of my participants had heard of nationally competitive awards because they knew someone that had applied or because they had been exposed to these awards through another program, others were either not aware of them or did not know about the different opportunities that they afforded. Some of the participants even pointed to lack of promotion on campus. Despite institutional attempts at promoting nationally competitive awards on campus, lack of awareness pointed to limited cultural capital in this process. It often took more direct experiences, such as targeted outreach, to motivate students to apply for the awards. Still, once they learned about the opportunities and saw previous awardees, they were often encouraged to apply and pursue their own goals through the awards. These results indicate that building an infrastructure of support would be beneficial in addressing the limited award awareness in students of minoritized backgrounds.

Resourcefulness in Navigating the Application Process

Applications for nationally competitive awards tend to be lengthy and have several requirements such as multiple essays and recommendations. In addition to the application itself, the application processes sometimes require interviews and nominations. This process can be daunting for anyone, but it can be even more challenging and unfamiliar to students from minoritized backgrounds who may not be able to rely on traditional kinds of social and cultural capital to go through a process that may be intuitive to other students who possess that capital. In Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, she describes navigational capital as the "skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80) such as universities, and it

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encompasses the resilience, drive, ingenuity that students of color possess allowing them to be successful despite the challenges they face. Navigational capital has been effective in students managing to succeed in higher education (Espino, 2014), but applying to nationally prestigious awards requires a very specific skillset that goes beyond navigating an academic institution. Throughout their narratives, my participants highlighted instances of resourcefulness in discovering creative ways of navigating challenges that arose throughout their application processes, and sometimes this meant seeking out individuals to support their endeavors.

The first challenge in applying to nationally prestigious awards is being aware that the awards exist and are available, and since most of my participants were not familiar with them, they relied on their own agency to find out more about the awards and how to apply. Despite limited awareness, a couple of the participants noted that they learned about these opportunities themselves. For instance, Vanessa found the Boren Scholarship after her mentor told her that she needed to study abroad in order to reach her career goals of working in the federal government. In describing her experience, she said,

> Since I knew that [studying abroad] was something that I wanted to do, I knew that I would need funding for it. So then, uh, during the beginning of the semester, I was like, "Okay, I need to find scholarships." I was just looking for scholarships and then I found the Boren award." [Vanessa, Interview I].

Vanessa took the initiative to look for a way to make studying abroad feasible for her, and it was later that she discovered that the award carried a government service requirement that would help her achieve her goals. On the other hand, while Isabella was familiar with the Fulbright program, she also found the particular award to which she applied through her own research. After learning about the work that someone who

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shared her interests had done through Fulbright, Isabella decided to look into the different programs further and found information about this exciting possibility. These instances exhibit resourcefulness in award awareness.

Because nationally competitive awards often involve putting together a project proposal for the applicant's intended work abroad, applicants are sometimes discouraged because they do not know how to illustrate concrete plans for their time abroad or even where to being thinking about this. Nonetheless, my participants described examples of agency in accomplishing this. Jorge, for example, had participated in a research-based study abroad program in his proposed host location, so he drew on this experience to put together his Fulbright proposal. According to Jorge, "I think it was the only easy part… just putting information together to then be able to write my personal statement or my grant proposal." Joann also used her previous research experience to plan her proposed research abroad but was concerned about how to approach her potential affiliate abroad. She said, "I was trying to find a way to fit all of this research I had done with the Fulbright with [a researcher abroad] that's doing cardiovascular research and I was like, 'Oh my goodness, what am I going to say?'" Joann took the initiative to have a conversation with a researcher in her proposed host location, and she described her research experiences and how they were related to his research. After that, he was more than happy to welcome her to his research lab. Likewise, Isabella made use of her previous experiences in research and other opportunities to build a strong project proposal and to identify contacts abroad that would work with her. These participants used the knowledge and skills they had acquired in past experiences to build strong proposals for their award applications.

Other applicants were applying to pursue graduate degree enrollment abroad through their prestigious awards, and they also took the initiative to explore the possibilities and build solid applications. Liliana, for example, learned that she needed to select an institution in her proposed host country at which she would study as a Boren scholar. Because her FIU did not have any partnerships in her proposed host country, she did her own research on programs and found the institution to which she wanted to apply. "I'm a very independent person," she said. Santiago, who had been trying to communicate with someone at his proposed host university without avail, decided to search FIU and the name of the university abroad and found a professor who had studied there. In addition to his ingenuity in finding this professor, Santiago also relied on the social capital that his status as an alumnus afforded him in making a connection with her and ultimately obtaining a letter of invitation from his proposed host institution abroad, which served to further strengthen his Fulbright application. In the end, Liliana and Santiago both relied on their resourcefulness in putting together their applications.

In addition to the proposals, applications to nationally prestigious awards often involve several steps and supporting documents. In their narratives, my participants explained how they were resourceful in completing all the requirements for their applications. Daniela described relying on her time management skills, "because there's a lot of components to the application and sometimes you have to go and get additional paperwork." These applications have essays that are the crux of the review, so several of my participants spoke about using their writing skills to write compelling essays. In describing the writing process, Santiago spoke about planning, and Vanessa discussed reflection. Marcos mentioned that he loved writing and that writing for his application

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came naturally because he was passionate about it. Liliana expressed that she had to focus on her academic goals and do research for her essays "because you're supposed to convince them essentially that you want to be in this program." She also described struggling with different types of writing but using her skills to reconcile them. She said, "So, it was kind of a mix of that and academic writing that I had kind of had to integrate together to write this paper. It was, it's a lot of switching back and forth. They don't mix." Daniela also reflected on being authentic, "Because sometimes when you're trying so hard to impress, you can come off as artificial and they detect that right away." Thus, the participants were their own best resources in writing their application essays.

My participants also reflected on instances of agency in finding and reaching out to resources that would help them along the application process for the awards. In some cases, this involved relying on their social capital and support networks. For example, Santiago reached out to his peer network for assistance with his application essays. He went through several rounds of review with these individuals, but he also used his own writing skills to perfect his essays. In addition, four of the participants talked about visiting the writing center on campus for essay reviews and feedback. Isabella said that she goes to the writing center often and that for her Fulbright application, "They were immensely helpful." Taking the initiative to access this resource involved knowing how to navigate the university.

Other participants practiced ingenuity in finding individuals who could facilitate the application process, such as locating the campus award advisor and contacting them for guidance. Applications to prestigious awards often require recommendations, and as noted in Chapter Six, my participants sometimes described asking for recommendation

letters as an application challenge. Daniela, for instance, had expressed concerns about asking her professors for recommendations because she did not know anyone who had experience in doing that. When I asked her how she managed this, she laughed and said, "I Googled it." This gave her the information on how to ask for references and the confidence to do so, and it demonstrated resourcefulness on her part. While these ideas may come naturally to some students, this was not always the case for my Latinx participants who are from a minoritized background and most of whom are first generation students.

Although the process of applying to nationally prestigious awards can be daunting, my participants expressed being able to rely on their own knowledge and ingenuity to navigate this process. Some spoke about having the enterprise to work on their applications mostly on their own, and they employed their writing and time management skills to complete their applications. They also highlighted their experiences that related to their proposed work abroad in order to build competitive applications. When they needed additional support or guidance from other individuals, my participants took the initiative to seek it out for themselves, even though doing so did not necessarily come naturally to them. The resourcefulness of my participants, therefore, was a key piece of the cultural capital that they described throughout their application stories, even though this may have been a bit different from the cultural capital that more privileged students bring to these award applications.

Summary

Through the narratives uncovered in their interviews, my participants illustrated how cultural capital related to the process of navigating applications to prestigious

awards. My participants demonstrated both positive and negative examples of cultural capital as related to award awareness, as some were familiar with the awards from knowing someone who had applied or being exposed to the awards through another program, while others did not know about them at all. The participants also exemplified cultural capital in describing instances of agency and creative ways of navigating the application process, even though they may not necessarily have possessed the traditional cultural capital of knowing how to do so. For many of my participants, their existing networks of support and those that they built in the application process were instrumental in persisting through and completing the process.

Counternarratives of Cultural Capital

In addition to the language and culture skills and the ability to navigate the application process for prestigious awards, the application stories communicated by my participants were different from the dominant narratives of Latinx students not having the cultural capital to be successful. According to Yosso (2005), research on students of color in higher education often comes from a deficiency perspective. This reflects a dominant narrative that values White students and what they bring to higher education, one that comes into practice when considering the systemic inequities experienced by students of color. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) present the concept of counter-stories as a form of resistance to these dominant stories that stem from privilege. The idea of counter-stories is based in critical race theory, which highlights the salience of race and racism in American higher education, revealing inequities and calling for change (Solórzano et al., 2005). Critical race theory defies dominant ideologies and the subordination of certain groups while highlighting social justice and the importance of lived experiences.

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Solórzano and Yosso suggest that counter-stories can unite marginalized groups in their shared reality and demonstrate other possibilities for them. In a similar way, Delgado (2013) stresses that shared stories are a strength of marginalized groups, noting that "An out-group creates its own stories, which circulate within the group as a kind of counterreality." (p. 71).

My participants' application narratives are, therefore, counternarratives of the higher education experiences of Latinx students. Though race was not necessarily explicit in the stories of most of my participants, they told "the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). My participants' narratives reflect their experiences as diverse Latinx students, perhaps members of less racialized groups, whose stories may not have been as widely told as those of other Latinx groups. My participants described their cultural identities as strengths, and they reported having the academic experiences that made them competitive applicants for the awards. They also described instances of resistance against deficiency narratives. In community cultural wealth, Yosso (2005) discusses resistant capital as a way of defying preconceptions, stereotypes, and inequalities surrounding race, culture, class, and gender. It includes students of color standing up for themselves in the face of oppression. Many of my participants described not facing discrimination, but they still emphasized the value of culture and illustrated how it was an asset for them.

Cultural Identities of Latinx Students

Cultural identity is central to my research, as I focused on students that identify as Latinx. While much of the research on Latinx students is on Mexican or Mexican American students, none of my participants shared that cultural background. Because

Miami is home to so many Latinx groups, my study allowed for the different perspectives

of Latinx students of other countries of origin and of different generational status.

Moreover, the setting of my study also provides a unique point of view, since Hispanics

are in the majority in Miami-Dade County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). All in all, this

offers a different narrative of Latinx students and of their cultural capital in higher

education and in the application process for nationally prestigious awards specifically.

Cultural identities were a point of pride for my participants, and their narratives

suggest that they did not view their Latinx identities in terms of limited cultural capital.

In fact, five of my participants reported that they have never experienced discrimination

in Miami. Isabella noted that while racism exists in her native Puerto Rico,

"…everyone's mixed, right? So, nobody really cares." She went on to say that while she

has seen racism in other areas of the United States, she does not feel on the defensive in

Miami. Joann felt the same way having grown up in Miami and expressed:

> Maybe I have been discriminated against, but I never felt that it's because,
> like, 'Oh, like, you're Hispanic,' you know? I've never felt that it's
> because of my ethnicity. And I think it's also, like, a perception thing. It
> probably does happen, but like, we're not raised on the defense in Miami.
> Like, everyone has their guards down. [Joann, Interview II].

In speaking about her experience as a Latinx and first-generation student, Vanessa said,

"Like, it's my norm. I didn't realize like what I'm working up against… Like, I'm just

doing what I have to do." Daniela and Liliana also reported not having experiences of

discrimination.

In fact, my participants sometimes struggled with the term "underrepresented."

Liliana, for example, identifies as a white Cuban and expressed that she has not felt

underrepresented or discriminated against: "I live in Miami, so everybody's Hispanic and

that, that means I'm equally represented pretty much here." Daniela mentioned pride in

her Ecuadorian and Argentinian culture several times throughout her interviews and also

affirmed that she does not feel underrepresented in Miami. She said, "I never felt like a

minority, but I do think I'm very proud of it, though. If anything, FIU makes you feel

proud of who you are, and Miami too, about being a minority." She went on to state:

> I guess I feel insulated here in Miami because this is just the norm where
> we're 3 million, 4 million people in Miami and most, it's a majority
> Hispanic city. So, sometimes when I hear the word minority, it, like, it
> doesn't click in my head. [Daniela, Interview I].

Similarly, Joann felt that she was the "opposite" of a minority in Miami and revealed that

being Latinx in Miami "Empowers you because you're like, 'I'm not different.'" For

these five participants, therefore, living in Miami where Hispanics are in the majority

seemed to shield them from feeling underrepresented.

Though Liliana did not feel like she was an underrepresented student because she

is Latinx, her narrative went beyond her Latinx culture, and she focused on her cultural

identity as a Cuban immigrant. According to Liliana,

> There's different iterations of Cubans, and I'm sure that they all identify
> as Hispanic, but they all, like, their grandparents were the ones that came
> here from Cuba. So, their parents went to college here. They know exactly
> what to do. They know exactly what programs to apply for. Or these kids
> who were born here. They already have a leg up. They didn't have to get
> naturalized as citizens. So, it's all these things. [Liliana, Interview I].

Though this was not necessarily the case for my other participants, all but one of whom

were first generation students in the United States, Liliana felt that this is what she

struggled with as an underrepresented student. She went on to say,

> I don't feel like I'm in a way underrepresented by my abilities or my, um,
> like academic performance or professional performance. But I feel like
> I'm underrepresented because I've just had to work a little bit harder to

understand American academic and professional culture." [Liliana, Interview I].

Liliana's cultural identity, and its intersectionality with immigration and generational status, directly reflected the cultural capital that she felt she brought to her Boren application.

While being Latinx in Miami did not seem to have an impact on how my participants viewed their cultural identities or cultural capital, those participants that had spent time in other areas of the United States had different experiences of culture. Isabella, Joann, Daniela, and Gaby all reflected on programs in which they had participated outside of Miami and on how they felt the shift in culture. In describing a summer research program in the Midwest, Joann said, "I felt like an actual minority over there." Gaby also participated in a summer research program at a prestigious institution in the Northeast and reported having difficulties with a professor there because of cultural differences:

> I think it actually caused cultural clash, um, with my research mentor in [institution]. Um, she did not get my culture at all. Like we just clashed, like... Like I tried my best to, you know, present myself in a way that, you know, she would accept, but also, like, I can't just change myself for the sake of other people… It was very hard to relate and to connect with her, especially when she wasn't willing to understand my culture or where I came from. [Gaby, Interview 2].

Despite this, Gaby worked hard and excelled in this opportunity. These participants felt the impact of culture and of being a minority in these instances. In fact, Isabella decided to pursue her master's degree in Miami in large part because she would be surrounded by Latinx culture unlike other areas she had experienced.

In addition to their Latinx cultural identities, my participants that identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community revealed instances of resistant capital and of employing cultural capital. For Marcos, Jorge, and Gaby, this involved educating others, even their own families, about their identities and sometimes having to contend with difficult situations, particularly due to the often-negative perceptions of these identities in Latinx culture. Jorge and Gaby reflected on their identities as central to their prestigious award applications. Jorge, for example, spoke about how his identity as a gay man played into his Fulbright application:

> Sometimes I think, "Why can't I say that I'm gay and this research, it's just part of who I am?" Obviously, when you do research, you don't want to make it personal, but those are, those are questions that I asked myself. Like, why do I have to change the way that I view things? Um, but at the same time, I also understand that every culture is different. [Jorge, Interview II].

Since his application would be reviewed in the U.S. and in his proposed host country, he noted that had to be mindful of his audience, but he struggled with deciding to include this information in his proposal. In addition, Gaby disclosed the struggle of formulating an identity during the application process:

> I started really embracing that identity and identifying as a Latine. Um, so when I was growing up, since I was bilingual, I had only heard of el y ella. But I never heard of like the nonbinary term *elle*, like, I hadn't heard until last year. Yeah. And when I started hearing it, I was like, "Oh, that's who I am!" [Gaby, Interview I].

Though *elle* had already submitted the Rhodes and Marshall applications, having gone through this process was key. These experiences allowed the participants to feel comfortable in their own identities and resist by using them as strengths.

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In summary, my results demonstrate how my participants' cultural identities reflected their views of cultural capital in the application process for nationally competitive awards. Though they may not have been thinking about cultural capital per se, the experiences revealed in their narratives illustrate instances of cultural pride and of how different cultures were important in forming their identities as individuals and as applicants. In addition, traditional narratives of Latinx students as underrepresented and not having the cultural capital to be successful did not seem to color the experiences of my participants, either because being in the majority in Miami brought about a different reality for them or because they resisted against these traditional narratives. In these ways, their cultural identities and the intersectionality of these contributed to the cultural capital they brought to their award applications.

Culture and Award Competitiveness

Most of my participants indicated that their cultural backgrounds were a strength in their applications and made them formidable applicants, contradicting the narrative that coming from a minoritized background would make them less competitive. Although Latinx students are underrepresented in the awardees for several prestigious awards, my participants reported that being Latinx prepared them for the award, often in terms of language ability and inter-cultural competence. Others saw their culture as a point of pride and something to highlight in their applications, particularly because prestigious awards with international components value cultural competence. Moreover, because many of the organizations that grant these awards are trying to diversify their programs, applicants from diverse cultural backgrounds should stand out to application reviewers.

For my participants, culture seemed to be an integral part of the cultural capital they brought to the application process for prestigious awards.

While language and cultural adaptability contributed to my participants' cultural capital overall, they also viewed their experience with language and the ability to communicate across cultures as a specific strength that made them competitive for their respective awards. Daniela, for example, spoke about how "knowing the mechanics of learning a language" and being able to relate to those learning a new language would help her teach English abroad through Fulbright. Santiago mentioned putting a few words in his host country's language in his application essays to demonstrate his familiarity with the culture. He explained that he was "able to draw from another language that I know to kind of use it as a literary device to, you know, keep the reader engaged with what I'm trying to convey." Isabella also described how her Spanish proficiency would allow her to communicate with her host community. In addition, she said, "Definitely Fulbright's about connecting with the people in the country that you're going, and what better way can a person connect to a person than a Latino if you're going to a Latin country? You're able to automatically connect with the country so fast!" Language and culture, therefore, contributed to perceptions of competitiveness in my participants.

Moreover, though students of minoritized backgrounds tend to be underrepresented among awardees, my participants did not see their cultural background as a weakness in the application process for prestigious awards. In describing her Latinx culture, Joann said, "I'm very proud, and I don't think, like, I don't think it's taken anything away from me." In fact, several of them saw it as something to highlight in their applications. In speaking of her Argentinian and Ecuadorian cultural identity, Daniela

affirmed, "I was excited to show that to Fulbright. This is who I am! And Fulbright is something global, international, and I think my heritage reflects that and the heritage of any Hispanic really." While he expressed that his proposed research topic was probably most important in the selection process, Jorge also felt that his cultural identity made him stand out as an applicant, stating "I think, uh, having a student that comes through from a different cultural background creates diversity." In a similar way, Gaby attributed the curiosity to learn more about the world to *elle's* cultural identity:

> I feel like because I'm Hispanic and I, like I said, I have a global background and all that stuff, I'm like– It's this desire to know other cultures that really pushed me to apply to the Rhodes and Marshall scholarship. Like, I really wanted to, like, get a taste of what research was like in another country, and I feel like I wouldn't have even thought of it if, like, I wasn't Hispanic. [Gaby, Interview I].

Gaby's cultural background inspired *elle* to be an inquisitive researcher, which suggested that culture was, therefore, an application strength since *elle* planned to conduct research as a graduate student through these awards. These participants saw their culture as something to highlight in their applications to nationally competitive awards.

In addition to underscoring culture in the application, Santiago viewed his cultural background and the application process more strategically. Because he had applied to several prestigious awards, he had experienced different selection processes and wanted to emphasize what made him stand out as an applicant. When I asked how he viewed his cultural background in terms of his competitiveness as an applicant, he said:

> I think it makes me stand out… All of these fellowship review committees, like, they want to find people that are competent and capable and can promote their values of mutual understanding, uh, being a cross-cultural communicator, like, all those things. But they also want to, or they try to, to create a diverse cohort. [Santiago, Interview I].

As a result, he disclosed that he wanted to use his application materials to emphasize

what makes him a qualified yet unique applicant. He said,

> They're looking at, you know, gender, um, ethnicity, and university. So, I
> definitely go into these application processes very specifically. Like, I'm a
> transfer student originally, so I have a community college background. I'm
> a male, I'm Puerto Rican, and I have good grades. [Santiago, Interview I].

In reflecting on this, Santiago went on to say that he felt uncomfortable about

approaching award applications in this way, but to him, it was important that he be

represented:

> I don't know, I do, like, I kind of feel guilty about it, but I, I definitely go
> into it with like that mindset. Like, I need to hit on these topics in my
> application… When I look at the grand scheme of things, even though,
> like, I'm looking at it very strategically, like, people of color are still very
> much not represented in these programs. So, like, I need to be there!
> [Santiago, Interview I].

Santiago felt that it was important to emphasize how he not only meets the award

requirements but also adds diversity. All of these examples illustrate how my participants

viewed their cultural backgrounds as an asset and something to celebrate in their

prestigious award applications, rather than as something that would potentially be a

weakness.

My participants felt that culture was a strength to highlight in their applications to

prestigious awards, both because of cultural pride but also to highlight their diversity.

Though most of my participants suggested that they did not feel like they were

underrepresented in Miami, those that had lived outside of Miami did report feeling that

way. In either case, the participants felt that their Latinx and other cultural identities

made them more competitive candidates for prestigious awards, and they employed

resistant capital in demonstrating this in their applications.

Award-Relevant Experience

   According to the dominant narrative, applicants to nationally prestigious awards have the cultural capital to be successful in these endeavors. In addition to having the knowledge of how to apply for these opportunities, they also know exactly what they need to do during their academic careers to make them competitive for these awards – maintain a high grade point average, participate in research and internships, engage with faculty and extracurricular activities, etc. Despite gaps in this awareness, most of my participants demonstrated having not only the motivation to apply but also academic and other experiences that directly related to these awards. Because these awards are so selective, applicants must put together cohesive and thorough proposals for what they intend to do during their time abroad. In addition, they must also have the academic experience and interests to complement the proposal. Depending on the award, applicants may need to demonstrate language ability, as well. Most of the participants described having experience that was directly related to the award to which they applied.

   The Fulbright U.S. Student Program provides funding for students to conduct research, pursue graduate study, or teach English abroad for a full academic year. Three of my participants applied to conduct research abroad, and they all had solid academic credentials for pursuing their research abroad. Joann, for instance, participated in a research-focused study abroad program and went on to be involved with several other research initiatives both on campus and across the nation. One of these projects inspired her research proposal for Fulbright. Jorge also had research experience and even a publication that directly related to his Fulbright research proposal. Isabella had also been conducting research in the sciences throughout her undergraduate and graduate careers,

and she felt that the experience she had gained in this time made her a qualified applicant.

She explained:

> For this application, you also had to have like some type of background,
> right? You can't be like, 'Oh I want to do this and this.' But where have
> you worked? Where have you interned? And yeah, I think when I was
> applying through Puerto Rico, I didn't have enough credentials for people
> to believe I was going to do a good job. But this time, I had done
> internships like several places that put my resume on top. [Isabella,
> Interview I].

In addition to her research and internships, Isabella had also received scholarships and

worked on projects funded by important national organizations.

Fulbright also has programs for teaching English abroad, and like Rhodes and

Marshall, allows for graduate degree enrollment. As an applicant to teach English abroad,

Daniela had relevant experience because she had been volunteering as a tutor. In

addition, her strong academic record as an English major prepared her for teaching the

mechanics of language, and she discussed how her knowledge of phonetics would be

helpful to her, if awarded. Santiago, who applied to enroll in a graduate degree abroad,

had previously spent time in his proposed host country and also had experience related to

his current application. He said,

> Uh, so my academic background, um, pretty much started in high school.
> Um, my senior year I got a scholarship to study abroad. Um, when I did,
> uh, I, um, was pretty much exposed to a lot of different things that I
> wouldn't have had the chance to like normally in the U.S. Like I learned
> about, um, international relations, like economics, like history, foreign
> languages, while I was there. And these are all things that I became
> interested in wanting to learn more about. [Santiago, Interview I].

He continued to study languages, and his academic record had prepared him for his

proposed graduate work. In a similar way, Gaby applied to Rhodes and Marshall to

pursue graduate study. *Elle* had stellar academic performance and at least six research

internships that served as preparation for the demanding coursework *elle* would pursue if awarded. Therefore, my participants had experiences that made them competitive for their respective awards.

The Boren Scholarship, on the other hand, focuses on language acquisition and national security, and my participants reported having experience in those areas and the drive to learn more. Vanessa, for example, had received a scholarship to study language in her host country and had spent several weeks there. experience Marcos had also spent some time in his host country and was familiar with the language. More importantly, he was interested in national security and the opportunities that the award could afford him in the future, and he explained this in his application. Furthermore, Liliana discussed how language learning was an important part of her own journey and how immersion is critical in the process. Academically, she said, "I spoke about all the previous research I had done in different areas, and how the country I want to study at is very important to the language and to a global kind of conflict, which is like cybersecurity." These participants, therefore, all spoke to experiences that addressed the mission of the Boren award, making them strong applicants.

The narratives of my participants illustrate that they had academic and practical experience that was relevant to the awards to which they applied. While the dominant narrative suggests that students of minoritized backgrounds do not seek out these opportunities or even know to do so, my participants engaged in research, internships, and other opportunities. They also worked hard to maintain good grades, which helped them to qualify for these awards. These examples indicate that they did possess cultural capital for nationally competitive awards.

Summary

Despite the narratives that suggest that students of minoritized backgrounds do not have the cultural capital to be successful in higher education, my participants' narratives reflect the opposite. They described instances of being proud of their cultural heritage, viewing their culture as something that strengthened their applications for prestigious awards, and having the experiences to qualify for such awards. Their narratives, as well as their desire to highlight their cultural experiences in their applications directly related to resistant capital, which is part of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Summary

The process of applying to nationally competitive awards requires cultural capital, and typically students coming from privileged backgrounds are the ones that are most successful in these endeavors. Students coming from minoritized backgrounds do not always have the specific skills to navigate these applications. Nevertheless, my results indicate that students of Latinx backgrounds do have cultural strengths and other abilities that make them stand out in the application process and also serve to make them competitive applicants. First, my participants were all bilingual and therefore had strong language skills in both English and Spanish. They also spoke about their ability to understand and adapt to different cultures. Nationally competitive awards with international components tend to privilege cultural adaptability because it relates to the mission of the awards, so these abilities not only made my participants stronger candidates for the awards but also contributed to their cultural capital as well-educated individuals. In addition, these abilities reflected linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005),

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addressing my first research question of how my participants experienced different types of capital in the application process for these awards.

In addition, my participants also demonstrated cultural capital in navigating the application process for nationally prestigious awards. One of the most salient examples of cultural capital was related to awareness of these awards. Some participants exhibited limited cultural capital because they did not know that these awards existed or that they could apply for them, while the participants that were fortunate enough to learn about these opportunities through others who had applied or through programs in which they had participated had the cultural capital needed for these awards. Moreover, the participants also spoke about resourcefulness in going through the application process, and this sometimes involved seeking out networks of support to facilitate their work. This also helped answer my first research question of community cultural wealth in the application process because it was an example of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005).

Finally, my participants' stories were counternarratives of cultural capital in Latinx students, challenging the dominant deficiency-based narratives of Latinx students and instead speaking of their cultural identities as strengths and of their competitiveness as applicants. One notable finding in my study was the differences in perception of culture among Latinx students, particularly how my participants did not view themselves as underrepresented because they live in Miami, but those that had spent time outside of Miami perceived those differences. Though other narratives often point to lack of cultural capital in Latinx students, my participants expressed wanting to highlight their cultural identities in their applications because this made them stand out as diverse applicants. They also viewed culture and their experiences as strengths in the application process.

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The sub-theme of counternarratives also addressed my research question of experiencing different types of capital, such as those in community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), in applying for competitive awards, as it showed examples of resistant capital in my participants. In summary, my participants demonstrated cultural capital in the application process for prestigious awards in various ways, suggesting that they can be competitive candidates for these awards.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins with an overall summary of my study and a discussion of the findings, including how they relate to the existing body of research and how my findings were significant. I also discuss how my findings address the research questions and close with a conclusion about what the significance of my research. Following that, I then describe the implications of my research. Much of the implications of my study are related to practice, particularly for how prestigious award campus advisors can work with their Latinx applicants. I also mention implications for theory on Latinx students and for Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework, as well as implication for policy as award organizations seek to diversify their awardees. I go on to talk about recommendations for further research, both to improve upon my research and also to suggest future directions. Finally, the ending section presents an overall conclusion to this study.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the application experiences of Latinx students applying for nationally competitive awards that have an international component. Inspired by Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth, I explored the application narratives of Latinx applicants to these awards, focusing on the strengths that these students brought to the application process. Many of the organizations that award these scholarships and fellowships are working to diversify their recipients (Gerz-Escandon, 2017), and as the Latinx population grows in the United States and the number of Latinx students increases as well (Torres et al., 2019; Valdez &

Lugg, 2010), it is important to explore and understand the educational experiences of this population.

Much of the research on the Latinx population comes from a deficiency perspective and rather than celebrating the richness of experience these diverse students bring to higher education, it calls for assimilation and making up for deficiencies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This research often treats Latinx individuals as a homogenous group, but their life experiences can vary significantly depending on country of origin and generational status in the United States (Torres, 2004) and even geographic location (Price, 2010; Frank et al, 2010). Moreover, there is limited peer reviewed research on prestigious awards, much less on underrepresented groups that apply for these awards. My research is significant because it adds to a very small body of research on nationally prestigious awards. It is also critical because it tells a counternarrative about Latinx students unlike other deficit-based stories – they do have what it takes to be successful in higher education. Moreover, it also tells the stories of Latinx students from different backgrounds, which leads to different experiences.

Using narrative analysis, I was able to explore and analyze the application stories of my participants, demonstrating the strengths that they brought to their prestigious award applications. My research questions focused on how different types of capital shaped the prestigious award application experiences of Latinx students, how these students viewed their culture in relation to competitiveness for the award, and what resources were helpful to them in the process. My participants were nine Latinx students from Florida International University who had applied to a nationally competitive award through the institution. Using two in-depth semi-structures interviews, I explored their

application stories and then analyzed the interview transcripts to uncover themes that were evident in the data.

The results of my study centered on three major themes – the importance of the family, social networks, and cultural capital in the application process. Overall, my participants' application stories were often counternarratives to the typical stories of Latinx students in higher education, as Solórzano and Yosso (2002) note that counter-stories are those that are not commonly told. In particular, my participants viewed their cultural backgrounds as strengths and drew upon different types of capital during the application process for these awards. The family was central in my participants' application narratives, in terms of both support and influencing them to seek to better themselves. In addition, my participants exhibited and drew upon social and cultural capital during the application process. Moreover, the way they experienced these types of capital and those in community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) was somewhat different from other research on Latinx students given that the study was set in South Florida, where Latinx students are part of the cultural majority, so this is an important contribution of my research.

Discussion of Findings

The first and most significant finding of my study is that the family was central in the prestigious award application experiences of my Latinx participants. Research on Latinx students points to the key role that family plays in the lives of Latinx students (Geertz González & Morrison, 2016; Torres, 2004; Yosso, 2005), and this was certainly true in my study. My participants' families encouraged them to *superarlos* and go beyond what they had achieved themselves, both through direct advice and motivation and by the

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family narratives of perseverance and sacrifice that they told. Families also instilled important cultural values like determination, hard work, and self-improvement in my participants, and throughout their narratives, my participants reflected on how these were important as they applied for prestigious awards. Torres et al. (2019) highlight the influence that cultural values have on the educational journeys of Latinx students. In addition, family support was also a key finding, as having support from their families was a driving force for many of my participants. However, several of them also spoke about how their families did not understand the awards or their decisions to apply, and others did not agree with their decisions to apply or with their proposed plans while abroad. These results on the importance of the family relate both to my first research question about how different types of capital influenced the application process and to my third research question about resources. In terms of community cultural wealth, my results reflect familial capital through family support and the inculcation of cultural values, aspirational capital in encouraging and influencing my participants to reach for the stars, and social capital in forming part of their support systems. This is in line with other research on community cultural wealth in regard to the role of the family (Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013; Wick et al., 2019; Espino, 2014), as well as with other research suggesting that family is key in successful Latino students (Zalaquett, 2005).

Another important finding was that Latinx applicants to nationally competitive award relied heavily on networks of support throughout the application process. In addition to receiving support from their families, my participants also drew on mentors, campus award advisors, faculty, and peers for both emotional and instrumental support. Mentors provided encouragement and advice not just in the application process but also

in navigating the college experience and in making plans for the future, and some even served as references for my participants. Institutional award advisors were instrumental in guiding my participants through the application, particularly because applying for these awards tends to be a complicated process that is not intuitive to most students. It may be even less so for those that come from minoritized backgrounds, as research suggests that these students do not have the knowledge and resources to manage college processes (Salas, 2016; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). Faculty were also essential in the application processes of my participants, even though some were hesitant in approaching their faculty. Several of my participants felt that there was an invisible line not to be crossed, which is in line with research indicating that Latinx students are not always comfortable working with faculty (Pérez, 2017; Espino, 2014). Still, faculty were helpful to my participants in advising them through difficult situations both in the application process and in general, in involving them in research and projects that would inform their application proposals, and in writing recommendation letters. Finally, my participants relied on friends and other peers, including award alumni, for support and guidance as they applied for prestigious awards. Previous research on Latinx students suggests that peer networks are vital (Pérez, 2017), though much of the other research on community cultural wealth does not emphasize specific networks of supports as much as my results do. Therefore, these findings about networks of support answer my first and third research questions – mentors, award advisors, faculty, and peers made up my participants' social capital and served as key resources in the application process. In addition, identifying these groups as helpful resources is a contribution to the available research, as they have not all been characterized this way previously.

Finally, though the research suggests that Latinx students do not have the cultural capital to navigate higher education (Salas, 2016; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011), the results of my study indicate that my participants did perceive cultural capital in applying to prestigious awards, and this was sometimes mitigated by social capital and by the fact that they applied while studying in a location where Latinx individuals make up the majority of the population. Being bilingual and navigating across cultures gave my participants the language skills and cross-cultural adaptability to be competitive for awards that would take them abroad, and these abilities also contribute to one being perceived as well-educated, which is a key indicator of cultural capital. In addition, while many of my participants lacked the cultural capital to be aware of prestigious awards, they demonstrated agency and resourcefulness throughout the process, which was sometimes shaped by social capital when they found the right resources to facilitate their application endeavors. In the end, my participants' narratives were counternarratives of cultural capital in Latinx students, as they reflected on of their cultural identities as strengths in their applications and of their competitiveness as applicants. Moreover, they did not view themselves as underrepresented students because they are surrounded by Latinx culture in Miami, and they wanted to highlight their diversity in their applications. These findings address my second research question about how Latinx students view their competitiveness as applicants, and they also speak to how they perceived resistant capital (Yosso, 2005), a form of community cultural wealth that focuses on challenging stereotypes.

These results directly answer each of my research questions. My first research question was, "How are Latinx students' experiences of applying to nationally prestigious

awards shaped by different types of capital?" According to the results of my study related to the importance of the family, Latinx applicants to nationally prestigious awards drew on familial capital in the form of family influence, cultural values, and family support, as well as on aspirational capital in the form of encouragement and inspiring a drive to always improve. My results also highlighted the importance of social capital in the award application process, and this was demonstrated in my results about the family and about networks of support like mentors, award advisors, faculty, and peers. My participants also exhibited navigational capital through their resourcefulness in the application process, linguistic capital through their language abilities and cultural awareness, and resistant capital in countering the narratives that Latinx students do not have what it takes to be successful in higher education. The results on cultural capital demonstrate these. In the same way, my results on cultural capital specifically address my second research question, "How do Latinx students view their cultural backgrounds in relation to their competitiveness as candidates for nationally prestigious awards?" In this study, Latinx students viewed their cultural backgrounds as making them more competitive applicants because of the associated language and cultural adaptability skills that would allow them to adapt well abroad, because of the merit involved in navigating an application process that is not intuitive to them, and because it makes them diverse candidates as award organizations seek to diversify their awardees. Finally, my third research question of "What resources do Latinx students applying to nationally competitive awards describe as helpful during the application process?" was answered through my results on the family and on networks of support, as these individuals were all key resources for my participants.

These findings answer my research questions and suggest that Latinx students do have the social and cultural capital to be competitive applicants for nationally prestigious awards. In addition, they are in line with the research that indicates that the family is of utmost importance for Latinx students. My study, therefore, challenges the deficit-based narratives about Latinx students. According to my results, Latinx students have different backgrounds and experiences, and they do bring unique strengths to higher education. In addition, though their cultural capital is somewhat different from the more traditional view, the richness of their cultural experiences translates to cultural capital. Rather than viewing culture as deficit, my participants perceived their backgrounds as something of which to be proud. This has important implications for higher education professionals working with Latinx students, both in prestigious awards and beyond.

Implications

My study has several important implications for theory, practice, and even policy. The major theoretical implication of my research is for theories about Latinx students and individuals. Theories developed to understand and examine the experiences of Latinx individuals need to be comprehensive and address the nuances in the groups that this larger group comprises. In a similar way, while Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth provides a different way of looking at the capital that students of color bring to higher education, my results imply that the types of capital in community cultural wealth are not experienced in the same way across Latinx groups. Most of the research on community cultural wealth has been on Mexican or Mexican American students (Wick et al, 2019; Espino, 2014; Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013), and students from different countries of origin have different experiences. The results of my

study also suggest that experiences vary by generational status and geographic location, as certain experiences are unique to immigrants versus second-generation students. Also, because my study was set in Miami where Hispanics are the majority of the population, my participants' Latinx experience differed from that of Latinx students from different parts of the United States where they are in the minority of the population. This implies that there are different narratives, even counternarratives, among Latinx students that merit theoretical consideration.

Moreover, my research also has several practical implications for working with students from Latinx backgrounds on applications to nationally competitive awards. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, a lot of the literature on nationally prestigious awards is in the form of books and journals specifically for award advisors (Gerz-Escandon, 2017; Simula, 2017; Bourque, Cotten, & Mentzer, 2015). My study adds to that body of literature in providing additional recommendations to award advisors. One of the implications of my research is that institutional award advisors need to be intentional and proactive in promoting prestigious awards to Latinx students. My results on cultural capital suggest that there is limited awareness of these opportunities among Latinx students, especially when these are first generation students. Even when my participants were aware of an award, they were not familiar with all the possibilities. Since some of my participants became aware of prestigious awards through programs and initiatives, award advisors should be proactive in targeted outreach and in reaching out to different programs across campus in order to collaborate on award promotion. Common places for highlighting these awards are education abroad offices, student researcher programs, honors programs. However, institutional award advisors should also consider partnering

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with less obvious areas of campus such as multicultural programs, student organizations that match the goals of the awards (e.g., future educators for Fulbright English Teaching Assistantships), and academic programs with an international focus. Because Latinx students may not be as likely to seek out these opportunities, it is important to meet them where they are.

In addition to targeted outreach in traditional and non-traditional venues, advisors should also focus on demonstrating feasibility to potential applicants – showing them that it is possible for them to be awarded. Several of my participants were inspired to apply for prestigious awards because they knew someone who had applied and been awarded, and sometimes these individuals encouraged them to apply. Simula (2017) notes that students from minoritized backgrounds often feel like they do not belong in higher education and much less as applicants to these awards, and award advisors should focus on combating that narrative. One way of doing this is by continuing engagement with Latinx awardees and then highlighting their success stories to counter the imposter narrative. Prestigious award organizations often encourage institutions to celebrate their awardees and celebrate their successes. If Latinx students see students that look like them winning these awards, they may be motivated to look into the opportunities themselves. This can serve to validate the experiences of different groups of students.

Furthermore, my results on cultural capital in the application process also indicated that my participants saw culture as a strength and that they had the language and cross-cultural awareness to succeed in programs with international components. As award advisors work with Latinx students on their applications, they should encourage students to highlight their cultural backgrounds in their applications. As award

organizations seek to diversify, including information about their culture on their applications makes Latinx applicants stand out as competitive. Bringing in cultural values and how they relate to the awards can also be helpful. In awards that include projects abroad, demonstrating cultural awareness and adaptability is key, and for Latinx students that consider themselves bilingual and bicultural, they are already adept at navigating two cultures. Disclosing language ability and reflecting on how this helps make their plans feasible is also helpful.

Finally, my results on networks of support and the family point to the importance of engaging the support circles of Latinx students in the application process. Institutions often strive to foster a campus culture that promotes academic opportunities and prestige, but campus award advisors should urge faculty and administrators across campus to encourage Latinx students and students from other underrepresented backgrounds to consider nationally competitive awards. My results suggest that mentors were key for my participants and that faculty served important roles, though not all students were comfortable approaching them. Creating a culture of openness can help students feel more comfortable in approaching faculty and staff for these matters. Also, as mentioned above, award alumni can also provide motivation and even instrumental support for future applicants. Moreover, because family support and influence were so salient in my participants' application experiences, award advisors should also engage the families of Latinx students whenever possible. This can include introducing prestigious awards to families at orientation and other programming so that they are aware of these awards and of the prestige and opportunities they can provide.

In addition to these practical implications, my study also has policy implications for the organizations that award nationally prestigious scholarships. These reflect the practical implications regarding outreach and alumni engagement, but there are certain things that only they can do at the level of the awarding organizations. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, most awarding organizations are making active efforts to diversify their applicant pools and therefore their awardees, and this helped to inspire my study. These entities should continue and expand these efforts to increase outreach, especially to minority serving institutions (MSIs). For example, Fulbright is currently making a conscious effort of reaching out to diverse institutions to encourage more applications. As suggested by my results about support networks and even cultural capital, award organizations should also engage alumni from different cultural backgrounds to promote their successes. Many of these organizations have profiles of current and/or past awardees, and demonstrating that they have awardees from diverse backgrounds can motivate students from underrepresented backgrounds to apply.

Recommendations for Future Research

While my research contributes to the literature by offering the perspective of Latinx applicants to nationally prestigious awards, there needs to be more peer reviewed research on these awards. As mentioned throughout the dissertation, much of the work published on this topic is limited to other dissertations and to publications for award advisors. Though dissertations are important research and information for advisors provides much needed practical guidance, further research that explores the motivations of students in applying for these awards, their perceptions of the process, and even the

experiences of those that are awarded would provide the field of higher education with an interesting perspective on these important programs of distinction.

Expanding and further diversifying the participants studied would also be an interesting avenue for future research. Because I had a small sample size in order to conduct an in-depth narrative analysis, I may have limited the diversity of my sample. For instance, over half of my participants applied to Fulbright awards and a third applied to Boren, but having more participants that had applied to other awards may have yielded different perspectives. In addition, though this is somewhat representative of the population in South Florida, half of my participants were Cuban or of Cuban descent and another third were Puerto Rican. I did not have any participants from Central America, even though Miami – particularly the area surrounding Florida International University – is home to a large population from that area of the world. Future research could also further diversify the groups of Latinx students that are studied, including Afro-Latinos, as different groups may have different experiences. Moreover, further research should also look at other underrepresented groups beyond Latinx students in applying for prestigious awards, as they would also bring unique strengths and skills that would make them competitive for these awards. Replicating this study at a different institution and/or in a different part of the country could also yield very different results.

Along these lines, future research should be conducted on other high impact practices in higher education and on the higher education successes of Latinx students. Much of the research on Latinx students suggest that they are not as knowledgeable about navigating higher education (Gándara, 2017; Salas, 2016; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014) and may not be as likely to seek out high impact practices such as internships, service

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learning, student research, and education abroad opportunities. Instead, a lot of the available literature is about compensating for deficiencies. While some studies focus on mitigation factors that bring about achievement in underrepresented students like Latinx students, future research should highlight the successes of these students and students from other minoritized backgrounds, perhaps illustrating counternarratives and either directly or indirectly highlighting cultural stories that may not be told as often.

In addition, I also recommend expanding research on community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which has gained popularity in studying underrepresented students. Community cultural wealth offers a different perspective on students of color, Latinx students in particular, focusing on less traditional kinds of capital they bring to higher education. This theory has been used to study persistence in Latino STEM majors (Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013), Latinx students studying abroad (Wick et al., 2019), and Mexican American Ph.D. students accessing and persisting through doctoral study (Espino, 2014). Nevertheless, the community cultural wealth research on Latinx students has almost exclusively studied Mexican and Mexican American students. While these make up a large part of the Latinx student population, my study demonstrates that Latinx student experiences vary by country of origin, generational status in the United States, and even geographic location. Therefore, community cultural wealth research should be expanded to include more studies on different Latinx groups. This would not only serve to better understand the experiences of the heterogeneous Latinx population, but it would also enrich community cultural wealth so that it is more comprehensive.

My final recommendation for future research relates to a difficult decision I made in reporting my data. In reporting my participants' narratives around the cultural capital

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that they brought to their prestigious award applications, I wanted to emphasize the wealth of experiences that helped make them competitive for the awards to which they applied. During their interviews, some of my participants described having extensive research and study experiences in their proposed host countries and even in the region. Going into detail about these experiences would have allowed me to demonstrate that these applicants had the necessary experience to qualify for these awards. It also would have helped document the successes of Latinx students in high impact practices. However, I promised my participants confidentiality from the moment that I invited them to participate in the study. Though I did not disclose whether any of my participants won the awards to which they applied, those that were awarded could have been easily identified through the awardee reports that are publicly available through the award organizations if I had conveyed their award-relevant experience the way I wanted. My research would have been richer with these details, and my applicants would have exhibited more resistant capital this way – showing that the do have what it takes to be successful despite the stereotypes that suggest otherwise. Baez (2002) argues that confidentiality should be questioned in order for research to be transformative, as being secretive could prevent change. Still, after discussions with my major professor, I decided to cut this information from my data, as my promise to my participants was most important. Instead, I presented general information about my participants' award-relevant experience in the hope that this could keep me true to my participants but still be transformative. Future research should address these considerations and maybe have deeper conversations about confidentiality, particularly in narrative inquiry.

Conclusion

My research on Latinx students applying to nationally competitive awards allowed me to explore the richness of cultural experience that Latinx students bring to higher education. In addition to learning more about the strengths that these students brought to the application process, my research also highlighted cultural differences within Latinx students of different cultural backgrounds and generational status. Moreover, because of the setting of my study, my research expanded the populations that have been studied in general and in relation to community cultural wealth, as these have been primarily Mexican American students. This provided different perspectives on community cultural wealth, as well as the strengths that can promote academic success in Latinx students. In the end, my research demonstrates that, thanks to the influence of their families and to their networks of support, Latinx students can leverage their cultural strengths in making them competitive applicants to nationally prestigious awards. Perhaps more importantly, like students of other minoritized backgrounds, they do have what it takes to be successful in prestigious awards and in higher education overall.

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APPENDICES

Interview Protocol

Project: Community Cultural Wealth in Latinx Applicants to Nationally Prestigious Awards

Interview Date and Time: _____ Place: _____
Interviewer: _____ Interviewee: _____

Interview Procedure: You are being asked to participate in an interview about prestigious awards. The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of underrepresented students in applying for these awards. During the interview, you will be asked to respond to questions about deciding to apply for one or more of these awards. You may choose to not answer certain questions. Please answer openly, as your responses are confidential and will not be associated with you. Please note that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy.

Informed Consent: Please sign the informed consent document to confirm your willingness to participate in this study.

Questions:

1. What prestigious award did you apply for and what did you propose to do if awarded?

2. How did you first hear about this award?

3. What inspired you to apply for this award?

4. What strategies and skills did you use in applying?

5. How have your language skills helped you in the application process? {*Refers to linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005)*}

6. How do you feel that your language skills and skills you acquired in language learning will help you be successful abroad? {*Refers to linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005)*}

7. Are there individuals in your family or other social circles that have guided you through your application or in your decision to apply? {*Refers to social capital (Yosso, 2005)*}

8. What resources or individuals have you utilized to navigate through the application process for this award? How did they help you? {*Refers to navigational capital (Yosso, 2005)*}

9. Can you tell me about a challenge that you encountered during the application process? How did you navigate that challenge? {*May refer to navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) – testing*}

10. In what ways has your identity as an underrepresented student (i.e., a Latinx student) been a strength in this application process? {*Refers to resistant capital (Yosso, 2005)*}

11. Tell me about how your cultural or familial values have motivated you to apply for this award? {*Refers to familial capital (Yosso, 2005)*}

<u>Closing</u>: Thank you for participating in this interview. I remind you that your participation and responses are confidential. Please feel free to contact me with questions at sgome056@fiu.edu.

Adapted from "Sample Interview Protocol" (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p. 368)

VITA

SUSY GOMEZ

Born, Hialeah, Florida

2000-2004	B.A., Psychology University of Miami Coral Gables, Florida
2004-2006	M.S.Ed., Counseling: Marriage and Family Therapy University of Miami Coral Gables, Florida
2007-2009	Developmental Specialist Institute for Child and Family Health Miami, Florida
2010	Admissions Counselor, Shepard Broad Law Center Nova Southeastern University Fort Lauderdale, Florida
2011-2015	Assistant Director, Education Abroad Florida International University Miami, Florida
2016-2021	Doctoral Candidate Florida International University Miami, Florida
2015-present	Associate Director, Education Abroad Florida International University Miami, Florida

PRESENTATIONS

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