

¿ES INGLÉS LA CLAVE?:

**LIFE HISTORIES OF FIRST-GENERATION-COLLEGE-STUDENT RETURN
MIGRANTS AND *THEIR* PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH AS KEY TO COLLEGE AND
PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS**

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
ENGLISH EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO
MAYAGÜEZ CAMPUS
2012

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Abstract

This research project explored how English and Spanish shaped the life experiences of first-generation college students who migrated between the United States and Puerto Rico. It focused on the consequences of transnational mobility for the identities of two women and two men and how their education in and out of Puerto Rico influenced emerging ideas about Puerto Rican identities, languages, and success. This work was guided by a life history methodology in order to understand the connections between personal and public concerns seeking to delve deeper into how language played an integral role in participants' college experiences. Using a Bourdieuan framework focused on different forms of capital, this study found that much more than proficiency in one language is needed in order to achieve academic and professional success on the island. This contests the common discourse that English is key to success and illustrates that low-income English speakers do not necessarily have the adequate capital needed in a university context.

Resumen

Este trabajo de investigación exploró cómo el inglés y el español formó las experiencias de vida de estudiantes de primera generación en la universidad, quienes habían migrado entre los Estados Unidos y Puerto Rico. Se enfocó en las consecuencias de movilidad transnacional para las identidades de dos mujeres y dos hombres y cómo su educación dentro y fuera de Puerto Rico tuvo influencia sobre las ideas emergentes de identidades, idiomas y éxitos para personas puertorriqueñas. Este trabajo fue guiado por una metodología de historias de vida con el fin de entender las conexiones entre asuntos personales y públicos. De esta forma, se buscó entender hasta qué punto jugó el lenguaje un rol integral en sus experiencias universitarias. Utilizando el marco teórico de Bourdieu sobre diferentes formas de capital, este estudio encontró que se necesita mucho más que dominio de un idioma para poder alcanzar el éxito académico y profesional en la isla. Esto cuestiona el discurso común de que el inglés es la clave para el éxito e ilustra que los angloparlantes que son de escasos recursos no necesariamente tienen el capital adecuado que se necesita dentro del contexto universitario.

Reconocimientos

En primera instancia quiero agradecer a Lucky Boy, Michelle, Sofía y a Sunny por haberle dado vida a este proyecto. Gracias por atreverse a contar sus historias, a hacer una diferencia y por confiar en mí. Guardo un pedacito de cada uno en mi corazón.

Gracias a aquellos profesores que desde hace años me hablaron del programa de maestría en inglés, como por ejemplo, José Irizarry y Betsy Morales. Gracias por su entusiasmo y motivación para que yo diera el paso en esta aventura. Agradezco a todos los profesores con los que aprendí cada noche en sus clases y en las conversaciones informales que solían complementar mis estudios. Hay profesores, que aunque no me dieron clases, siempre me mostraron solidaridad: gracias Mary Sefranek y Ricia Chansky.

Agradezco a la familia del MayaWest Writing Project por haberme regalado una de las experiencias más enriquecedoras de mi vida. En especial, mi gratitud a Ellen Pratt, NanVan Vicente, Zenaida Sanjurjo y Maribel Acosta.

A Rima Brusi y al Centro Universitario para el Acceso (CUA), por abrirme los ojos a que no tenemos que aceptar por hecho las circunstancias en las que nacemos. Rima, encontré parte de mí cuando entendí que los asuntos de pobreza, acceso y equidad no sólo podían problematizarse, sino que tenían que serlo.

A Jocelyn, por creer en este proyecto desde sus inicios y por haber servido como una excelente presidenta de mi comité hasta que fuiste bendecida con la presencia de Ámbar. Gracias por las conversaciones, las controversias, las risas, las lágrimas, por la solidaridad, la amistad, la enseñanza y el cariño. ¡Estas historias también son tuyas!

A Cathy Mazak, por rescatarme cuando pensé que todo estaría perdido. Gracias por ser la presidenta de mi comité justo cuando más lo necesité. Fuiste una gran mentora enseñándome más de lo que imaginé sobre la investigación, mientras respetabas mi espacio de hacer el

proyecto que yo quería documentar. Agradezco inmensamente todas las oportunidades personales, académicas, y profesionales que me brindaste. Soy una mejor estudiante hoy gracias a nuestra colaboración.

A Rosita Rivera, por no pensar dos veces en estar en mi comité. Te agradezco el apoyo que me diste desde que hablamos por primera vez. Siempre estuviste dispuesta a ayudarme sin importar distancias ni horarios. Gracias por tu retroalimentación valiosa.

A Kevin Carroll, por decir que sí y por apoyar mis trabajos desde aquel curso de Pedagogía Crítica. Siempre voy a recordar los buenos debates y la colaboración que tuvimos en proyectos importantes.

A María Yolanda Canabal, por formar parte de mi comité. Su retroalimentación me sirvió de mucho ayuda y orgullo.

Agradezco los beneficios que como empleada no docente de la UPRM tuve para obtener mi grado de Maestría. Específicamente reconozco a Lissette Rolón, Rafael Jackson, Manuel Valdés Pizzini, Moisés Orenge y Leonardo Flores, quienes fungieron como mis supervisores en diversos periodos y quienes dieron respaldo a mi meta. Muchas gracias a Jamilette y a Diana por todas las palabras de aliento en la oficina.

A mis amigas y amigos que siempre estuvieron presentes, dando apoyo desde lejos y cerca y también entendiendo el espacio que necesité para culminar esta meta. En especial, quiero agradecerle a Elsa, a Lizzie y a Kimberly. Ustedes son más que amigas para mí y valoro infinitamente que estén en mi vida.

A mi familia querida es a quienes más agradezco. A tí Mami, Milyssa, Harry y Ashley, gracias por estar ahí, por apoyarme, por sentirse orgullosos de mí y por tener paciencia cuando había que hacer negociaciones de tiempo, actividades y tareas. ¡Los Amo!

Y a ti Iván te seré eternamente agradecida por haberme dado el espacio, la oportunidad y el apoyo de continuar estudiando. Sabías que era mi sueño y gracias a ti lo logré. Gracias por siempre creer en mí, aún cuando yo ya había dejado de hacerlo. Te Amo.

Dedicatoria

Estas páginas guardan todo el tiempo y esfuerzo que gané académicamente, pero que también perdí con amigos y familiares. Aunque no podemos dar marcha atrás, dedico este proyecto - que nació desde mi corazón - a las amistades que quizás descuidé, pero más importante, a mi querida familia. No puedo devolverles el tiempo pero sí puedo darles el fruto donde fue invertido. Cada palabra, párrafo, página, hora y noche que aquí me representa, se las dedico a ustedes, en especial a Mami, Milyssa, Harry, Ashley e Iván.

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Chapter I: From personal storytelling to life history research: Setting the stage for an introduction

“You have to keep studying; you have to finish high school.”

In 1995 those words meant the world to me. My mother constantly emphasized them to my soon-to-be husband and I with such demanding persuasion that I never imagined dropping out of high school, not even after becoming a pregnant graduation candidate. Having a high school diploma was a must, especially because she had attained her General Education Diploma (GED) at the age of 31 while raising six children. I did indeed graduate from the only public high school in Añasco in 1997 and even considered applying to a university at that point. More than my future plans, what interested me about college was not what higher education represented, but that my best friend was going to apply. I remember the sunny morning in which we were bombarded with flyers, pencils, souvenir bags and applications to various educational institutions, mostly private ones. It all seemed so exciting, everyone seemed interested, or at least, every student wanted memorabilia. Either way, we all took something back home with us that day. In my case, besides the collection of colorful gifts, I carried a mind full of questions about college: What did I need it for? What would I major in? Could I afford it?

Those questions were soon substituted with pregnancy planning, marital obligations, living inadequacies, and a part-time job earning \$4.00 an hour. I didn't apply to college when my classmates did but my frequent conversations with a friend who was in college, my writing English essays as a favor for another, and my relentless analysis of the people and spaces that surrounded me made me notice I was longing for something else. I realized that I wanted to go to

college, and began a tedious process in order to enter. At the time, I did not know that my journey was similar to others' paths to college as I would have to face "cultural, institutional, and financial obstacles being an academically prepared student" from the low class who wished to go to college (Hurst, 2009, p. 1).

The application process itself was the first hurdle I faced. I had not taken the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEBS) while in school, so I had to contact their offices for dates, fees, etc. I had an uncle drive me to the examination facilities in a very old and embarrassing truck that was teasing with breaking down due to its poor maintenance. After arriving, I had to wait until everyone was seated since my name was not readily found on the list. Upon finishing the test, I remember using a public phone booth to ask my mother to pick me up. She was always supporting me; my mother, such a strong woman. In fact, she was a room away from me when I was filling out the application to the University of Puerto Rico (UPR).

In doing so, I had to ask acquaintances about academic offerings, since I had not received adequate advising while in high school. The UPR was not my first choice, since I was interested in obtaining a degree in Education. However, practical reasons did not allow me to study in a private institution that offered such specialization. I did not have a car, or a person to drive me some 22 miles back and forth on a daily basis. And because I was then married to a male chauvinist, who did not understand why I wanted to become better educated, residing in another town during the week was not an option. My then husband's attitudes had been influenced by the role women had played in his family for many years. While he had no problem with having a working wife, he believed college was unnecessary. For him, a woman's place was in the household, not away in campus housing. It was then that my preference became the Mayagüez Campus of the University of Puerto Rico, even though I had heard it was highly competitive and

difficult to get admitted. I selected Office Administration as a major and was mistakenly accepted into the Psychology Department. Instead of seeing this as a positive causality, I requested an appointment with the Chair of the Admissions Office to inform her of the error. I had believed my best option was to continue in Office Administration since it was what I knew how to do, since I had taken a similar track in high school. My recollection of the application process is vague, but a vivid memory that I will cherish at heart was when my mother called me to let me know that I had received a letter from UPRM (*el Colegio*).

It was in front of my mother's house, where I had been living with my daughter and husband for some time already, that I opened the envelope. I was sitting on an old, rusty rocking chair in what my family who lives in the *campo* calls *el batey*.¹ The sounds of the *coquis* and the shaking leaves of the banana, plantain and breadfruit trees along with neighbors passing by blasting their favorite music from their cars seemed so far away then. It was just me and my acceptance letter to *el Colegio*. It was just me rubbing my belly since I was expecting my son in about eight months. It was just me thanking God and absolutely deciding to confirm my enrollment because if I didn't, I knew I would risk becoming pregnant many more times; and that was something I did not desire. For a few minutes, it was just me and my present and then me and my future. But soon after, it became me and my past as well.

That moment represented everything my immediate family did not have and would never entirely understand. I realized then that this marked my entering into a different world, one in which my husband (who had only made it to tenth grade) would have to accept; and one in which my mother was proud of, but could have lived without. It was then that I started having mixed feelings. I felt as though I was breaking a barrier no one had asked me to break. I pondered about being the only, or one of the few, in my family to decide to go to college. I have a big family,

¹ Translation: countryside; backyard

whose members mostly live in Massachusetts, where I am originally from. Of my five siblings, only one has obtained countless certificates in different areas, but only after I began college. I felt that this would mean I would inhabit two sharply different places. Years later I understood that this anxiety responded to the fact that I was about to become a First Generation College Student (FGCS): “a student who is the first in his/her family (mother, father, or siblings) to complete a college education” (Payne, 2007, p. 1).

At the time, I didn't let this affect me for I was proud and I felt special. I felt as though my mother's intuition had been right when deciding to get us away from the gangs that started gathering around the middle and high schools in Fitchburg, MA. I was going to prove how good a person I had become living in Puerto Rico away from everyone else, especially from my four older sisters. I knew I would be successful in college, because I was being supported by almost everyone close to me. Everyone except my husband, who had questioned why I was going to college and even dared to say it was *para pasar el macho*². I knew then too that, beyond his jealousy, he would not understand this college lifestyle. And it was hardly a lifestyle. I only went to campus to take classes because I had other commitments. Unfortunately, I never participated in extracurricular activities and never hung out with college friends in *La Calle Bosque*³; activities that mark a student's formation at *el colegio*.

But regardless of his point of view, that was excluded early on in my education career due to a divorce, I knew I would do good. And I attributed this sense of success in part to the luck of being bilingual. Since I had moved to Puerto Rico at the age of twelve, I was constantly told how important it was to know English, how much easier things would be for me, how I would be able to have a better job and even how I would be more highly regarded in comparison

² Translation: to waste time.

³ Translation: The Bosque Street. An area close to campus in which students gather during the night.

to those who did not know the language. English, the medium of communication I used for my first words, the language I never questioned, the one I took for granted, suddenly became much more. English had become a tool, an instrument that I was determined to use for my benefit. Again, I felt proud, superior and thought that if I knew English in Puerto Rico, everything was going to be okay.

My feelings of superiority, however, did not last. In fact, they shed right off in August 2008 when I was an official *colegial*.⁴ I was attending what is considered one of the most prestigious universities in Puerto Rico. Crossing that threshold was not what I had expected. I was a *prepa* pregnant woman coming from *abajo* and I noticed this immediately.⁵ In my walks from one building to another, in my classes, in the library and even in the cafeteria I realized everything I “lacked.” This atmosphere was far away from home, and far away from me. I felt that college life was about wearing the right clothing, driving the right car, living in the right places. I certainly didn’t “fit the bill” because I could barely make ends meet. College also became about having learned a handful of advanced subjects that had been taught in specialized classes before starting the university. It became about having had access to computers. Even more puzzling for me: college was about mastering languages I did not understand.

It was confusing to receive a syllabus and even more so to attempt to decipher the terminology used both in Spanish and in English. Yes, in English, which made me realize that it was not about the luck of having been born in the States, having no “accent” and “knowing” how to read and write English. I learned that there were dozens and dozens of peers that understood all of this much better than I had even though they had never traveled outside of Puerto Rico. College became frustrating. I saw myself as someone who did not know what to do or how to do

⁴ A student of the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez, informally dubbed *El Colegio*.

⁵ Translations: first year student; “from below” or from the working class.

it but with the energy to learn. I also saw myself questioning why I had gone to college and in the need of explaining my worries to someone else, but there was no one to talk to. At the time, there was nobody close enough for me to confide that I didn't "understand university" and that I needed help. There was nobody with academic experience and capabilities that could provide mentoring.

Being a good student was becoming less tangible. But I started focusing on creating study habits that I never had. Throughout my undergraduate education things turned more positive. Eventually, with the help of a professor, I was able to adapt. Prof. F. believed in me, never hesitated to help, and always recommended me for student employment opportunities while studying, especially because I was bilingual. She became one of my role models and was always concerned about my personal and professional development, in a special, motherly fashion. I looked up to her and felt I could not let her down. That helped me excel in different areas.

I graduated from the UPRM with honors, friends, experience and a job offer. Things turned out better than I had expected. Despite all the trials and tribulations I went through, I succeeded at the end. I would always add that my accomplishments were also due to being lucky, being in the right place at the right time, being blessed, and having the necessary skills required in a particular moment.

Sometimes I look back and wonder what I would have done if things would have been different; if I hadn't been so lucky. I would not have been able to go to college without the financial aid I received, without having childcare, without having my mother transport me and then having her help me buy my first car. And I would not have been able to do well in some of my classes if I hadn't known English because many of my textbooks were not in Spanish. They

were in English, and not the ordinary, everyday English one is accustomed to; but quite a scholarly use of the language that would confuse me many times.

Now that I am an employee at the UPRM and a graduate candidate, I have shared stories with others students who were also the first ones in their family to begin college. I have also heard countless complaints and/or praises from those who master the English language and the different ways in which they use it on the island. Moreover, I have reflected upon my own and my colleagues' and classmates' experiences regarding how they have used or not used English to their benefit after returning from the mainland and how their English competence has been perceived by others. These concerns have led me to reflect on how English speaking return migrants, like myself, use their language, specifically if they are first generation college students.

The *testimonio* I have shared serves as a basis for me to question, understand and make meaning of the circumstances I have confronted in my life, especially in reference to my college experience as an English dominant return migrant. Despite our different and sometimes divergent experiences, we have all been conditioned by the same myth: that in Puerto Rico *el inglés es la clave* or that English is the key to success. In this formulation success is defined in strictly material terms: access to better educational and professional opportunities, higher salaries, upward mobility, etc. The basis for this line of argument might very well be the body of research that demonstrates that English proficiency in Puerto Rico has been historically associated with the upper classes and the more highly educated (Barreto, 2000).

However, my experience and that of my peers as well as my familiarity with literature on the plight of first-generation college students has led me to interrogate the extent to which English proficiency, in the case of FGCS return migrants is also *la clave del éxito* in Puerto Rico. This thesis project stems from and seeks to explore the belief that English is indeed the key to

success. It aims to study the meanings that first generation college student return migrants give to the use of English as a means for upward mobility in Puerto Rico. The study is inspired by personal experiences, hoping to contribute in filling the gap in academic literature. Lack of information regarding the aforementioned concerns is part of what constitutes the research problem.

Statement of Research Problem

English has been used in Puerto Rico for over a century in all levels of society such as education, business, tourism, etc. (Pousada, 1999) and is today, as well as Spanish, an official language. The Department of Education requires the language to be taught from K-12 and at college level, English courses are also a requirement. Nonetheless, as of 2002, only approximately 30% of the island's population can make effective use of the language for means of communication (Torres, 2002). I acknowledge this percentage to be an old figure and that there may be new information that was not available at the time of this project. For more than five decades researchers have concerned themselves with this apparent discrepancy to the point that much research on English use in Puerto Rico focuses on aspects pertaining to English teaching and English learning. While research in these areas is very important, in the context of Puerto Rico, it has tended to focus on native-born and native Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans, with few qualitative studies conducted on return migrants' use of English on the island.

On the other hand, a belief that has been taken for granted by many is the fact that knowing English immediately places the user in a higher social status than people who do not know the language (Barreto, 2000; Pousada, 1999). There is a gap in the literature gathered in Puerto Rico regarding if indeed this is true or how indicators of social class may influence language learning. There is also a need to examine whether English competence has any bearing

on the socioeconomic status or social mobility of return migrants on the island. Although Duany (2002) claims that “circulation tends to improve a person’s occupational and educational status, as well as English-language skills”, he centers much of his renowned research on the many movements of the people between Puerto Rico and the United States. Duany is considered an important scholar on transnational migration and diasporic studies among both territories and has contributed greatly to the literature of how the concept of migration has shifted, particularly in the case of *La Isla del Encanto*.⁶ While his work will vastly guide my project, at the moment of this writing, I have yet to find studies concerning English as the determinant instrument for upward mobility upon return migrants’ movement to Puerto Rico. Hence, I wonder if the situation may be different for these migrants in comparison to circular migrants who come in touch with the second language more frequently. Due to the fact that Puerto Ricans are, in legal terms, U.S. citizens, our movement from Puerto Rico to the mainland and vice versa is continuous, allowing constant use of both English and Spanish among natives and U.S. born *Boricuas* (Aranda, 2007; Godoy et al., 2003). This interchange of language promotes to a certain extent that Spanish be considered an identity marker and English be perceived as an instrumental marker for upward mobility (Barreto, 2000). However, it is not clear how successful return migrants actually are when arriving to Puerto Rico for purposes of educational and/or employment opportunities (both indicators of socioeconomic status). We have yet to know whether and, if so, how English competence influences performance throughout college studies in Puerto Rico for return migrants. Furthermore, there is a lack of information regarding how English proficiency and performance in college is influenced by social class.

Social class can and has been determined by indicators such as reported family income, level of education, area of residence, among other factors in governmental documents such as

⁶ Translation: The Island of Enchantment. A name that Puerto Rico is also known as.

federal applications and census surveys (Brusi, 2009). An indicator of social class that has hardly been studied in the context of Puerto Rico is first generation college students (FGCS) (Brusi, 2009). Although Brusi has begun to study this population, to my knowledge, in Puerto Rico there is no previous research on how these students have to confront college lifestyle while making use of English. By focusing this research project on FGCS return migrants' use of the language and how they perceive meaning in relation to English and upward mobility, I will contribute to increasing our understanding of what it means to be a FGCS and of how other factors, such as language, influence our educational journey. These issues are of great importance within academic fields, increasing the significance of this research, which will be justified in the following section.

Justification

The project is justified on three main grounds. First, in terms of the extensive body of research on English education and English competence in Puerto Rico there are at least two main gaps it addresses. On one hand, many former Master of Arts in English Education studies have been focused on the native Spanish student population that benefits from the Department of English, specifically in English courses that have been offered. The phenomena of native English speaking return migrants, many of whom constitute current undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty of the department, continues to lack attention in the body of literature for the context of Puerto Rico. Flores (2009) shares that “the re-entry of thousands of Puerto Rican families, many of them born and raised in U.S. cities, has had an enormous though largely uncharted impact on the Island society, such that assumptions about the meaning of national culture itself, and intersecting issues of territory, citizenship language, gender, race, political representation, and social class, are of necessity addressed in new ways” (p. 4). This research

focuses on a sub-set of this under-researched population, expressly first generation college students, a gap in the literature as documented by Brusi (2009).

The second justification for the need of this project concerns its methodological approach. Research into the life histories of first generation college student return migrants will allow us to follow the steps of C. Wright Mills (1959) in “linking personal troubles to public issues” (p. 248). Bathmaker (2010) states “how the connections between personal and public concerns may be understood and interpreted as important questions for narrative and life history research” (p. 1). This is true in moments in which we have been bombarded with television news, shows and computer videos and programs that are dedicated in following the lives of real and ordinary people (Bathmaker, 2010). Life stories will serve to shed light on research that has not yet been conducted within English education, social class, and return migrants in Puerto Rico.

The third justification of this study is to pursue interdisciplinary dialogues between the growing field of English Studies and other disciplines such as Sociology, Anthropology, History and/or Social Justice. Since 1984, the Department of English at the UPRM has been graduating candidates that have complied with the requirements for the Master of Arts in English Education (MAEE). A vast number of theses⁷ have been presented concerning literature, linguistics and pedagogy, but few have attended to these fields through a lens guided by gender, race or class. At a time when the field of English Studies is being reconfigured and enriched with the collaboration of other disciplines, I want to face the challenge and emphasize studies related to topics that may affect the use of English in Puerto Rico. This research project represents an alternative in research options within the path of pedagogy. During these years, the Department

⁷ For the complete list of theses by topic and authors, please refer to the Graduate Student Handbook of the Department of English: <http://www.uprm.edu/english/gradhandbook.pdf> and to the Graduate Studies website: <http://grad.uprm.edu/oeg/TesisDisertacionesDigitales/Ingles>.

of English has been admitting students with diverse educational and professional backgrounds. While studies in the three main specializations of the program are necessary, innovative projects are being born, not only to attend students' interests, but to contribute to a field of knowledge and literature in other genres that complement the teaching-learning process of English in the context of Puerto Rico. Interdisciplinary methods of research and teaching are rapidly growing and we cannot risk not being at the cutting edge in education (Thompson-Klein, 2004).

As I have previously stated, these justifications aim towards contributing in several ways, making this research project a valuable study that will be discussed subsequently.

Type of Study

As has been suggested in my prior references to life histories, the thesis project is guided by a qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Specifically, I will conduct a qualitative case study utilizing oral history.

Framing this project as a case study will “blend a description of events with the analysis of them...and will focus individual actors or groups of actors, and seek to understand their perceptions of events” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253). This is of significance with life histories as well. According to Portelli (2006), one of the distinguishing traits of oral history is that “it tells us less about events than about their meaning” (p. 36). That is, by employing oral history I intend not only to recover the memories and experiences of return migrants who are also first generation college students with regards to how English has influenced their educational and social experiences but also how they interpret these recollections.

My *testimonio* shows how I interpreted such recollections with regard to my own experiences. It exemplifies how and why I have a particular interest in studying the meaning that first generation college student return migrants give to the use of English as a means for upward mobility in Puerto Rico. With the intention of unveiling their perceptions, it is pressing for particular research questions to guide this study.

Research Questions

As I mentioned in my *testimonio*, stories and experiences that I've heard from classmates and colleagues have instilled in me the need to question the 'why' of certain situations and outcomes. In the quest of assigning meaning to my personal encounters and informing this process by the pertinent scholarship I have reviewed, there are several questions that arise and constitute the focus of this study.

The first research question that must be answered is: (1) How do FGCS return migrants represent, in the narration of their life histories, English, English competence and their own linguistic practices and experiences in Puerto Rico? As McLaren (2010) mentions, culture is construed upon the meanings and circumstances that groups give to it; thus, it is important to learn how English is conceptualized, apprehended and regarded in the participants' culture. Moreover, since oral histories intend to capture defining moments in a person's life, the objective of this research question is to understand what English means to those who use(d) or do (did) not use English on the island after arriving from the mainland.

Considering the dominant view of English as "key to success" in Puerto Rico, as well as previous studies associating English proficiency with academic superiority and better employment opportunities, it seems pertinent to ask as well: (2) To what extent does English proficiency play a role in FGCS return migrants' decision to pursue a college degree? This

question will explore the reasons why FGCS decided to apply to college, considering the extent to which English proficiency was a factor.

In light of research findings discussed further along that report, first, that FGCS are less likely to apply to and remain in college than students whose parents are college educated and, second, that return migrants often experience difficulty adapting to and/or being accepted in their home country, my next research question asks: (3) How do FGCS return migrants characterize their college experiences and the value of a college education for themselves and for their family? This is of great significance for this life history project as it will enable us to trace the personal histories of individuals caught in two complex transitions: the geographic migration of relocation to Puerto Rico and the symbolic migration of entering a cultural space that has remained unavailable to their parents and, often, their relatives.

Finally, my project seeks to address two interrelated questions: (4) To what extent might English proficiency influence performance in college for FGCS return migrants?; and, (5) To what extent might English proficiency influence upward mobility for FGCS return migrants?

In synthesis then, by answering the five research questions stated above, this thesis project seeks to examine the memories and meanings that FGCS return migrants give to the English language and English competence in reference to their college education and to upward mobility. It seeks to voice these circumstances in such a way that the life histories of the participants will be clearly represented. Furthermore, this research work examines how identities are shaped when being in distinct geographical areas, having different educational achievements, and negotiating with family and friends.

Having served to set the stage, my *testimonio* has been followed by a clearly presented research problem along with justifications of why this project is needed. How the type of study acts as a contribution has also been described so as to thoroughly meet the research inquiries.

The reading progresses into the second chapter with a review of the literature in order to become familiarized with the context of Puerto Rico and key terms that are crucial to this project. In detail, I describe the epistemological stance that oversees this study, and the theoretical lens that have framed this work. Chapter 3 displays the methodology that best guided this research initiative followed by a chapter dedicated to the analysis of the data, answers to the research questions, and the arising of new findings. Finally, a conclusion chapter not only ceases to tell the story of what was presented in this research project, but hopes to provoke the telling of many life histories to come.

Chapter II: Language, Movement, and Capital: a review of the literature

The subsequent section introduces a synopsis of the use of English at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez (UPRM) and in Puerto Rico in order to grasp why the language issue is of relevance for FGCS and for return migrants. It also offers an overview of key concepts related to the thesis project that although briefly mentioned before, deserve deeper explanation. I finalize the chapter by pointing out how my epistemological stance construes this work along with a segment detailing the theoretical lens that guides this research.

The historical sketch included in the 2011-12 Undergraduate Academic Catalogue of the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez (UPRM) states that:

Today, the Mayagüez Campus of the University of Puerto Rico continues its development in the best tradition of a Land Grant institution. It is a co-educational, bilingual, and non-sectarian school comprising the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences, Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Engineering, and the Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies (2011, p. 1).

For prospective students the classification of the University as a bilingual school may give the impression that Spanish and English evenly and fluently co-exist in all institutional operations, including the classroom. However, there is no official documentation regarding the implementation of language use. Moreover, it is well known by University community members that, excluding courses of the Department of English and those offered by professors who are unable or choose not to communicate in Spanish, courses are taught predominantly in *Español*⁸.

The fact that the UPRM describes itself as a bilingual institution aligns with a law that was approved in 1993, under ex Governor Pedro Roselló's administration (1992-2000), which reinstated English as one of the official languages (alongside Spanish) in Puerto Rico. To

⁸ Translation: Spanish.

understand the background of this measure it's useful to briefly review the history of English in Puerto Rico⁹.

Pousada (1999) notes that although Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States by Spain under the Treaty of Paris in 1898, “the initial contact between English and Spanish did not occur with the invasion of U.S. troops in 1898, but rather had its roots nearly a hundred years earlier” (p. 36). The author explains how the United States started influencing Puerto Rico’s economy by means of active trade. When the Department of Public Instruction was created on the island in 1901, the medium of instruction varied continuously. Algren (1987) explains how administrations changed their policies regarding the teaching of the language seven times from 1898 to 1949. In 1949, as Algren details, Commissioner Villaronga made the final decision that “Spanish is the medium of instruction at all levels of the public school system with English taught as a preferred subject” (p. 10). Until 1997, the Villaronga policy remained in place followed by the most recent change to present: the medium of instruction in the public school system in Puerto Rico is Spanish and/or English (Torres, 2002).

After ratifying English as an official language, ex Governor Rosello’s administration proposed, through the Department of Education and its then Secretary, Dr. Victor Fajardo, ‘Project for Developing a Bilingual Citizen’. While this may have seemed to fit accordingly to the Pro-Statehood governor’s ideologies, the plan was highly criticized due to a number of contradictions, subjectivities of bilinguals, biases of monolinguals, lack of empirical data, definitions and concepts regarding bilingualism (Torres, 2002). To my knowledge, the most tangible result of this project, and an exception to Villaronga’s model, is the formation of public

⁹ For additional information regarding the history of English in Puerto Rico, there is extensive literature available, such as official Government Reports and scholarly work.

bilingual schools, although limited in offerings. I am unaware of the assessments that have been conducted in monitoring the success of graduating bilingual students from these public schools.

In 2012, sixty-three years later, the majority of state schools still offer every class in Spanish except for English.¹⁰ While one may suggest that many academic offerings in the UPRM follow Villaronga's policy, it is a reality that there is no official language policy in the institution, allowing some courses to be taught in English. This situation obliges one to question the extent in which the campus is bilingual. Inside the classroom, even though textbooks are often in English (especially in Engineering, the Natural Sciences, Business Administration, and less commonly in the Social Sciences and the Humanities), lectures and discussions are more often than not conducted in Spanish unless the professor is a native English speaker, or a speaker whose first language is neither Spanish nor English, and who chooses the latter in communicating. Other instances in which Spanish is evidently used are in departmental and faculty meetings, official mailings sent by the campus' electronic mailer, the University's webpage, official publications, and in Senate certifications. Beyond these formal means of communications, Spanish is heard in social interactions in the campus cafeteria, the hallways and in studying areas.

On the other hand, bilingualism is formally endorsed by the fact that students are required to study English. As shown in the Academic Catalogue 2011-2012, the general education requirements by subject area stipulate that students must register in and approve a minimum of 12 credits in English (p. 26).

¹⁰ The existence of private schools in Puerto Rico brings the opportunity of attending a bilingual institution or in some cases, an English monolingual school. According to the General Education Council, in the Academic Year 2006-2007, the ratio of students registered in private vs. public schools was 166, 704 to 523, 197 students. This represents a 76% of students registered in public schools and 24% registered in private institutions.

As we have begun to see, there is much to ask – and a need to know – about the type of bilingualism that the UPRM attributes to itself. While recreating and analyzing the life histories of the participants of this study, it has become evident that Spanish has been used more frequently within the UPRM than English. Moreover, the prestige variety of English within academic settings is a scholarly variety, not the everyday register learned by most return migrants. The mission seems to be to aspire towards the fixed category of Standard American English (SAE), or the more recent term, languages of wider communication (LWC) (Smitherman, 2001).

This exemplifies experiences I recall in my *testimonio*. Having been born and raised in the mainland is not equivalent to mastering this type of English. Return migrants may find themselves overwhelmed, as I did, with the differences among language use. As I have mentioned before, in Puerto Rico there is a belief that English is key for success. Speakers who are more proficient are presumed to have greater opportunities to excel than those with less command in the language. The way we speak, reaching a prestige variety, may be indicative of users being portrayed from a higher social class and status. As Stubbs (2002) points out, “It is almost impossible, for example, to hear someone speak without immediately drawing conclusions, possibly very accurate, about his social class background, level of education and what part of the country he comes from” (p. 66). Due to the importance of English proficiency and upward mobility in Puerto Rico, it is pertinent to draw upon existing literature related to these issues in the context of the island.

Language Competence and Upward Mobility in Puerto Rico

The English language in Puerto Rico has been often regarded as betraying one’s mother tongue, assimilating into an American culture, representing a preference towards Statehood

(Algren, 1987; Pousada, 2007; Roamé, 2002), among other attacks made by many native-born islanders. Yet, it has also represented the key to success for academic performance and future employment. According to Blau and Morales (2009) “the motivation to learn English is mainly instrumental (to accomplish a goal) rather than integrative (to belong to a culture)” and that “students report that they learn English primarily to get jobs that pay well” (p. 45).

Many scholars indicate how English proficiency in Puerto Rico can lead to better opportunities. As early as 1959 Rodríguez Bou, then Permanent Secretary of the Superior Education Council, connected English knowledge with upward mobility. In his report about the Puerto Rican educational system, Rodríguez Bou acknowledges that there are material limitations to learning English in Puerto Rico because the learning of languages is expensive.

We cannot expect from all individuals a uniform proficiency in the mastery of a second language – or even of the vernacular. Not everyone learns languages with the same facility, and this is more true when there exist marked differences in opportunities at home, in the social environment and even in the school itself. (p. 176)

Former president of the University of Puerto Rico, Norman Maldonado (2000), contends that “a better knowledge of English is considered the key to future success. Mobility in society and the professional arena has become a motivation for teaching and learning English in Puerto Rico” (p. 489). Pousada (2000) conducted a qualitative study in which she interviewed 30 participants linked to the University of Puerto Rico. The focus of her research was to learn how social and educational factors influenced the development of competent bilinguals in order to improve English instruction. All thirty respondents in Pousada’s study agreed that being bilingual was a great benefit in terms of more job opportunities, increased social confidence, improving academically, among other advantages. In the study, the only disadvantages of being

bilingual cited by respondents were “the abuse of their translation abilities and the fact that island-raised Puerto Ricans often mocked the speech and cultural values of US-raised Puerto Ricans and viewed English-speaking Puerto Ricans on the island as snobs or colonialists” (p. 104).

While the notion of English as key to success is continually repeated, it seems as though it has become more of a truism than a fact. Although Pousada presents the findings of her participants and what they perceive as advantages of being bilingual, the researcher does not provide examples of upward mobility by her respondents. The only study I have found thus far that presents data regarding affluence and English proficiency on Puerto Rican grounds was conducted by Barreto (2000). He studied income and language in different municipalities of the island. Barreto found that there was a tendency for greater English language use when the reported income was higher, although this could not be ascertained in every town. His study provides important information and is of significance to this research project.

Although we have learned that having English proficiency on the island may represent an instrument towards upward mobility (Barreto, 2000; Maldonado, 2000; Pousada, 1999; Pousada, (2007), we do not know how this plays out in the case of return migrants (with English proficiency) who do not meet higher levels of socioeconomic status (being first generation college students). Adding to this is the concern about return migrants’ knowledge and performance of English being able to meet the ideal standard in Puerto Rico. In order to better comprehend what SAE and LWC entail, I find it appropriate to offer a separate discussion in the subdivision below.

Standard American English (SAE) and Languages of Wider Communication (LWC)

Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2003) define SAE as “the dominant, or prestige dialect of English that many Americans almost speak” (p. 455). They add that SAE “is an idealization. Nobody speaks this dialect; and if somebody did, we would not know it, because SAE is not defined precisely” (p. 455). As the term itself resembles, this type of language causes mixed feelings just by reading, hearing and/or pronouncing it. It seems to idealize a white, American, upper class speaker. This uneasy description and ambiguity in terms of meaning may have caused scholars to look beyond this categorization and transition towards the Language of Wider Communication (LWC) model.

While this classification may be perceived as an umbrella term to increase effective communication among speakers from different race and class backgrounds, I believe it is shifting to political correctness but comprising the same end result. When describing the LWC, Smitherman (2001), Distinguished Professor of English, linguist and educational activist informs us that “this is the language of literacy, commerce, politics, and education, and it is a necessary addition of most people’s linguistic repertoire” (p. 38).

Evidently, these terms can and have been used interchangeably. I stress though the importance of how Smitherman (also known as Dr. G.) highlights ‘most people’. This caution matches her point of view in questioning the “when, how, for what purposes, and at what cost” (p. 38) LWC is needed. I find it interesting that she uses the example of a well paid plumber. While this occupation receives a more than decent salary, the need of LWC is inexistent. In other words, the plumber could speak African American Vernacular English, communicate effectively with clients, and still be a successful plumber. Throughout the development of the research conducted for this thesis, we will revisit these concepts, the perceptions of the contributors

towards ‘good English’, and possible answers to the questions that Dr. G. poses, hopefully adding ‘for who?’

Before finalizing this segment, I clarify that although I believe the difference in terminology has not necessarily changed what is idealized, for the purposes of this study, I will employ the concept of the Language of Wider Communication. My position is that there is hope for the name of LWC to expand frontiers of biases and accept intelligible speakers who will not feel confined to the same expectations of what standard is; allowing for greater communication.

More than asking if LWC is influenced by people’s movement in space, we should aim at knowing how it is. There are many studies regarding sociological effects of migration (Duany, 2011; Flores, 2009; Godoy, 2003); but specific literature aiming at language use of return migrants in college or elsewhere in Puerto Rico is scant. The need to bridge this gap in the literature is imperative, especially because there are vast amounts of studies regarding return migration of Puerto Ricans on the mainland (Duany, 2011; Flores, 2009; Zentella, 1997). Before singling out characteristics of return migrants, it is necessary to comprehend how the phenomenon of migration has marked the Caribbean island.

Puerto Rican Migration

Surprisingly earlier than what is typically discussed, leaving Puerto Rico commenced during the years of 1868-1895 when the group named ‘The Pilgrims of Freedom’ sought to become independent of the Spanish Crown (Duany, 2011). During the century to follow, and already under the ruling of the United States, the second important displacement took place between 1898-1930, primarily as a means for gaining job opportunities (Duany, 2011).

This change of place - from Puerto Rico to the United States - was predominantly experienced after the Spanish-American War, when the island was ceded to the American nation

(Duany 2002). Known as The Great Migration, the third phase occurred during the years ranging from 1945 to 1964. This event forever marked the island's history and has been the era that has received the most attention within its migration studies. In the course of this stage, the peculiarity of return migration emerged while emigration declined. Before exploring return migration, let me briefly continue pointing out other significant phases in Puerto Rican migration.

In his recent and succinct contribution of migration affairs on the island, Duany (2011) delves deeper and states that “a restless circulation of people characterized the fourth period of the Puerto Rican exodus, roughly between 1965 and 1980” (p. 53). Of considerable importance is the fact that he goes on to propose ‘The Post-Nuyorican Phase’. According to Duany (2011), “the current stage may be called ‘post-Nuyorican’ because many Puerto Ricans have moved away from the New York metropolitan area, especially to Central and South Florida” (p. 54). I find the statistic that Duany (2011) shares to be alarming: “more than 913,000 Puerto Ricans moved to the mainland between 1980 and 2009” (p. 54). However, it is even more startling to learn that according to the U.S. Census Bureau 2010, many of the Islanders who have left were the mid-aged, higher educated and professionals; leaving the *islita*¹¹ with older and younger people who are less educated and employed. Without a doubt, concerns of brain drain surface since in the past, those who fled were the ones that are now staying.

During my trips to Orlando and Miami in 2005 and 2009, respectively, I noticed incredible presence of Puerto Ricans and asked myself many times why it was happening. It is only now that I realize how my unconscious concerns have underlined my intriguing quest as a result of conducting research for the thesis required in the Masters program. I suppose that being a return migrant myself; I have always been fascinated by the cause and effects of movement to and from the island. Even though I have, admittedly, used the terms “return migration” and

¹¹ Translation: Little island, usually used when referring to Puerto Rico with warmth and care.

“return migrants” unproblematically in the preceding sections, it is imperative to provide a consistent working definition of these related concepts.

Gmelch (1980) explains migration as “largely a one-way movement with major streams of migrants” displacing themselves from one country to another. Although the term and act of migration have received much analysis, Gmelch noted that return migration would soon become more relevant with regards to movement. He reminds us that “as early as 1885...Ravenstein had noted the principle of return migration in his renowned list of migration laws: Each main current of migration produces a compensating counter-current” (p. 135). In 2012, this phenomenon is as vivid as before, obliging scholars to pay attention not only to migration and return migration, but to what Duany (2011) emphasizes for circular migration, transnationalism and the diaspora.

Inspired by my own story, this thesis project focuses on return migration. I do admit however, that while reading about recent trends in migration, I became tempted in re-thinking this study and assuming a circular, transnational approach. After much reflection, I realized that the most practical – and ethical – choice was to continue with the original design. In the midst of and prior to the data collection process, all four participants, as I will share further along, fit the profile of return migrants rather than circular ones. Return migration should not be equated to circular migration, a term that continues to lack a clear definition, but that many scholars, according to Godoy (2003) agree that for it to occur two or more returns would have to take place. Duany (2002) contends that he prefers “a minimal definition of circulation as the completion of two full migrant cycles, that is, at least two round-trip journeys between the Island and the mainland” (p. 295). It is important to note that for this scholar, “imposing an arbitrary time limit on the category of circular migrant...is artificial and unnecessary” (p. 295). Continuing specifically then with return migration, Rivera (1994) explains, “Puerto Ricans began to migrate

to the United States, especially after the Second World War, searching for work in an economy that had a great demand for unskilled and semiskilled labor” (p. 1). However, as Rivera continues, “the reverse trend of migration began to be felt greatly by the end of the 1960s as a result of economic recession in the United States. The rate of migration from Puerto Rico declined while return migration increased” (p. 12). According to Rivera (1994), return migrants have struggled with two cultures and two languages. She adds:

For many, this did not come easily, yet it was very important to returnees that they be accepted back in their homeland. The returnee has gone through the necessary adjustments and adaptations in the United States and upon return to Puerto Rico.

It is clear that return migrants confront two situations upon their arrival to the island. Alongside their encounter with Puerto Rico is the fact that many of them are more familiar with the cultures and dominant language of the United States than of their “homeland”, and some might even be admired for speaking *el difícil*¹². Yet, a parallel reality is not fitting in to what native-born islanders define as true *Boricuas*, and the issues of identity and culture this entails (Duany, 2011; Zentella, 1997). More so is the reality of the lack of bilingual education programs and having returnees educationally affected by being held back a year, when they often times come from disadvantaged communities in the United States.

Rivera’s (1994) work analyzed return migrants and language in a college atmosphere. Her proposal was to follow ‘The School of Tomorrow’s individualized English program’ in order to create a sample unit for return migrants that illustrated their same situation. The goal was for students to use their native language as they did before moving. I do not know if this was implemented or put forth for the consideration of institutional policy makers. While her

¹² Translation: The difficult one, term colloquially used by non-English speakers to refer to the English language.

dedication in the area helps, it does not draw a picture of the experiences return migrants confront or the meanings they give to such experiences.

Godoy (2003) states that researchers have studied the concept of return migration “as an entry point into broader debates, such as the causes and consequences of circular migration, the role of proficiency in spoken English in the decision to migrate” (p. 208), among others tests. However, he also indicates that “few studies explicitly focused on the link between proficiency in English and migration” (p. 216). The study, conducted by Santiago-Rivera and Santiago (1999) concluded that those who were more proficient in English tended to migrate to the mainland; that the more educated people were, the higher number of returns to the island, especially if they did not know English; and that language proficiency was taken into greater consideration versus non-economical reasons when deciding to migrate. Although this quantitative research contributes to the study of language and return migration, it did not measure how proficient return migrants were or the schooling levels they had achieved. Return migration is a continuous reality in Puerto Rico, and we need to understand how return migrants perform within the context of arriving to the island, specifically with regards to language proficiency (in English and Spanish), and how this might affect their achievement in college.

Achievement in college can be influenced by any number of factors, particularly those in which students do not have control over. According to Baker (2001), “underachievement may be attributed to socioeconomic factors that surround a language minority group” (p. 298). Considering these ideas, it is important to engage with factors that define and influence student’s educational experiences, as a whole, not only for language learning. Beyond limiting conversation to first generation college students – an integral part of this study that will be

sharply addressed as a dimension of socioeconomic status – it is necessary to explore various integrative topics concerning indicators of social class and higher education.

Social Structural Factors in Higher Education

While discussing language competence, I alluded to upward mobility when mentioning how knowledge in English on the island is perceived as a vehicle of social status; that is, the higher the proficiency level, higher the chances of better employment and of representing a higher socioeconomic status. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that leveling up is not only seen through the language one speaks, but more importantly, by the education one has. Dika (2010) states that many scholars are giving much attention to how poor students come in contact with and succeed in college going opportunities, taking into consideration the importance attributed to a bachelor's degree for social mobility. Since the related benefits of education for society are numerous – social mobility, optimal lifestyle, and increased health (see Díaz, 2010 for a review) – it seems vital to assure access to those who might not have such an easy path in gaining extended education. Yet, as evidenced in the research literature, social class can play a positive or negative role when dreaming with a college degree gets awakened by a person's reality, particularly a low-income first generation college student.

I follow the definition of Engle et al, (2006) that first generation college students are “students whose parents have not attended college and/or have not earned a college degree” (p. 13). Engle and colleagues conducted a qualitative study at the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education in Texas. Due to the increase in college attendance in this state, the Institute not only explores the reasons why FGCS apply to higher education, but also how to assure retention rates for this population. More than gaining information about what motivated students to apply, the researchers gathered data on specifications of the process of applying and what did not work for them.

In their study, they provide crucial characteristics of first-generation students. Less than 47% decided to enroll in any higher education institution when their parents had never studied as opposed to 85% of students that were non-first generation students. First generation college students “are both less likely to attend college and less likely to persist to a degree” (p. 13) and are more likely to “come from lower-income families than students whose parents have college degrees” (p. 14). These characteristics are important indicators that may also influence how students perform in college, especially how FGCS are represented on the Caribbean island.

While there is much research work done regarding social class and education, it is too scarce – or unknown of/unpublished – in the context of Puerto Rico (Dika, 2010). In spite of this, the Center for University Access (CUA) is housed at the UPRM, aiming to integrate low-income students (who live in public housing) in the college community with the goal of motivating them to apply to college. Furthermore, the CUA conducts ongoing research not only with the population it serves, but of their space and surroundings, such as home, schools and potential academic institutions of interest. Such work is published through the Carvajal Working Paper Series. The purpose of the series, funded by the Francisco Carvajal Foundation “aims to disseminate knowledge that may be relevant to the development of institutional and public policies directed at increasing access and success among low-income populations” (About the Carvajal Working Series, para. 1).

In the first working paper titled “‘If you go with the flow...’ University, Geography, Inequality”, Brusi (2009) sets out to explore what occurs to individuals on a daily basis in particular settings, describing some of the ways in which educational inequality is generated and expressed. Focusing on a qualitative methodology, she found that the narratives of interviewees shed light over three main spheres in the production of access and success in higher education for

a group of pre-college, public housing students. The population was frequently conditioned to what it implies to be a first generation college student, what mechanisms were utilized by educational institutions and how it made the application process much harder, and ideologies of higher education and who is deserving of it.

Díaz (2010) produced a paper titled ‘University and Human Capital: Social Class and Educational Attainment in Puerto Rico’. In the effort of descriptively identifying and exploring the gaps of class in access to higher education on the island, he centered his attention to two possibilities associated with family income: having studied in a private institution or having parents with a college education. The results of his work were astonishing and purport the need of investigating first generation college students. Briefly, what we learn from Díaz’s research is that there is a strong connection between social class and access, causing difficulties in reaching the public university. This is regardless of the fact that state education tuition costs are less expensive than private alternatives. The findings are troubling since they indicate that low socioeconomic students have less chances of applying for a college degree. And if they do, they tend to select private institutions, causing their representation to be greater than high socioeconomic status students. These gaps remained present when taking into consideration family income, comparison of public or private school attendance, and parent education. This occurred throughout the entire stage of deciding to go to college: applying, being admitted, and retention (Díaz, 2010).

In ‘Student Persistence: Socioeconomic Factors Related to Student Persistence at the University of Puerto Rico’, Dika (2010) found evidence empirically demonstrating educational attainment inequities on the island. Her study is of special attention to this thesis project due to the fact that it discloses that “high income students whose parents attended college were

significantly more likely to persist in college than low income/first generation students (p. 2)”. Additionally, Dika (2010) calls for the need for qualitative studies that will illustrate understandings of what this population confronts. Her mention of necessary research conducted through social and cultural capital frameworks is again another justification of the design of this research work.

The most recent published working paper of the Carvajal series, ‘College Access and Urban Poverty in Mayagüez’, shares cultural biographies of residents living in public housing in the town of Mayagüez, Puerto Rico; the town in which the state institution of higher education, the UPRM, is located. Brusi (2011) “looks at the ways in which the barriers to educational attainment get manifested and ‘dealt with’ in actual lives” (p. 2). Analysis of the life histories of her participants contemplates what cannot be seen by numbers and percentages. This paper enriches studies about social class and the difference between desiring to go to college and having the capacity to aspire. This study relates to my own in the sense that listening about life histories connects directly with public concerns.

I have taken the time to provide a brief overview of the Carvajal Working Paper Series since I believe there is a need to continue documenting research grounded on the topics previously discussed. Likewise, the CUA has made a remarkable difference in learning about issues of social class and access to higher education in the context of Puerto Rico. Not only has it situated concentration on the island, but on the University of Puerto Rico and on the Mayagüez Campus. I too emphasize the academic setting situated on the west coast. As part of my efforts for this thesis project, I requested data from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIIP) at the UPRM campus. While I will explain the process of obtaining and analyzing

necessary statistics as part of the methodology in the following chapter, allow me to contextualize, in this review, how indicators of social class are present at the UPRM since 2005.

Figure 1 shows the population of entering first generation college students admitted to the UPRM since academic year 2005-06 until 2011-12. According to the data provided to this researcher by the OIIP, *El Colegio* has received 15, 719 students; of them, 16% are FGCS. I computed this sum by selecting records that indicated parent education ranging from no education to high school and/or attended college but did not complete a degree. As is evidenced, the number of students who are FGCS has decreased as years have passed. This may suggest that the population of parents who are continuing studies is increasing, similar to what Díaz (2010) speculates in his work. Yet, it might suggest that as years pass, less and less FGCS are able to start a college degree at the UPRM, similar to what Díaz (2010) found in his research. About a fourth of the population was composed of FGCS seven years ago and only 9% are representative in the most recent academic year, 2011, in which this thesis was written. This is a consequence of a recent policy approved in the UPRM, in which the College Admission Index was raised. This was a conscience and strategic effort in downsizing the amount of students who entered. As a result, those who are left out tend to be those who have fewer resources. These numbers attest to tendencies, but do not answer the questions of how and why these tendencies may have happened.

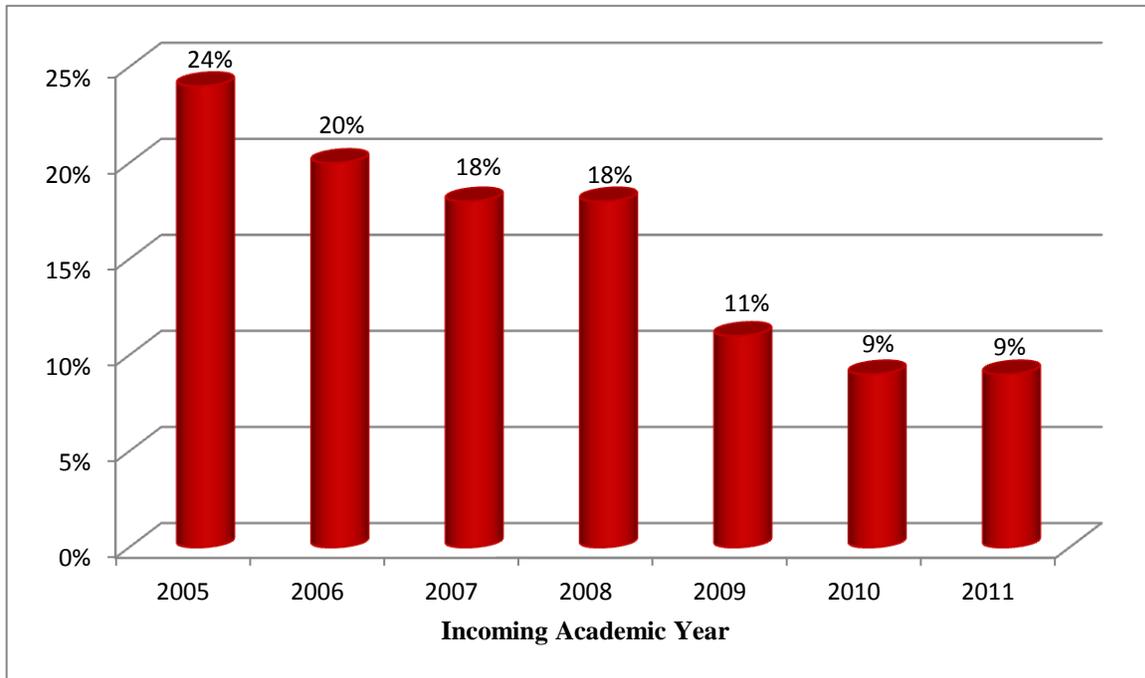


Figure 1: Population of FGCS entering UPRM since 2005 until 2011.

Figure 2 illustrates high and low income levels of FGCS in proportion to the income levels of the UPRM first year entering students in academic years corresponding to 2005 until 2011. I followed Dika's (2010) formula in calculating income status. She included the three lowest ranges of income that appear on the UPR application form (less than \$7,499, \$7,500-\$12,499, and \$12,500-\$14,999) along with the two highest (\$40,000-\$49,999 and more than \$50,000). This roughly models the top and bottom quintiles of median income in Puerto Rico. It is important to share what an OIIP employee clarified to me. These numbers reflect what students reported. At times, they may omit information in fear that it might affect their financial aid eligibility. As we can observe, FGCS are proportionately much poorer than the entire entering class during the years in reference. This sustains, to a certain extent, Brusi's idea (2009) that although low-income students are not necessarily FGCS, there is a tendency of FGCS being low-income students.

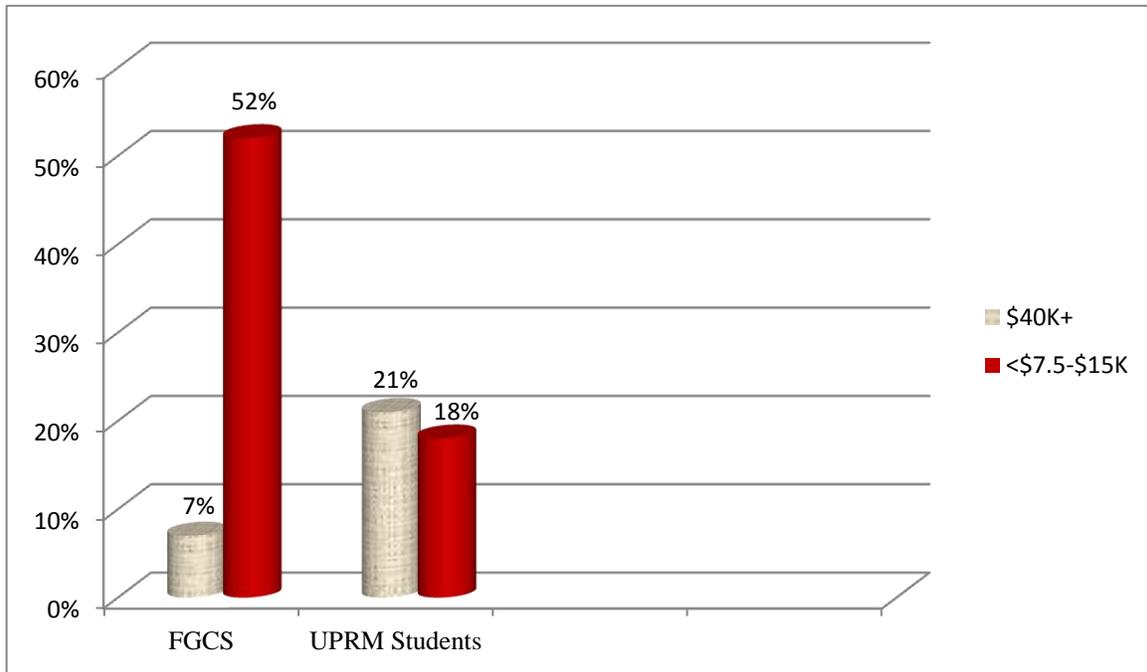


Figure 2: Reported Family Income of FGCS in proportion to UPRM entering population from 2005-2011. (K=1000)

The type of schools students have attended is yet another indicator of social class. In this review, I took into account public and private education, excluding GEDs or other types of education that may have been reported. Figure 3 demonstrates an 11% difference of public school over private school students entering UPRM. The tendency though is that within the FGCS population, there is a constant indicator of social class. In this case, many more students receive public education in proportion to the entire UPRM entering classes. In analyzing all three charts together we can certify that for the last seven years, FGCS have been less represented at the UPRM and that those who are represented, are less privileged in terms of income and education formation.

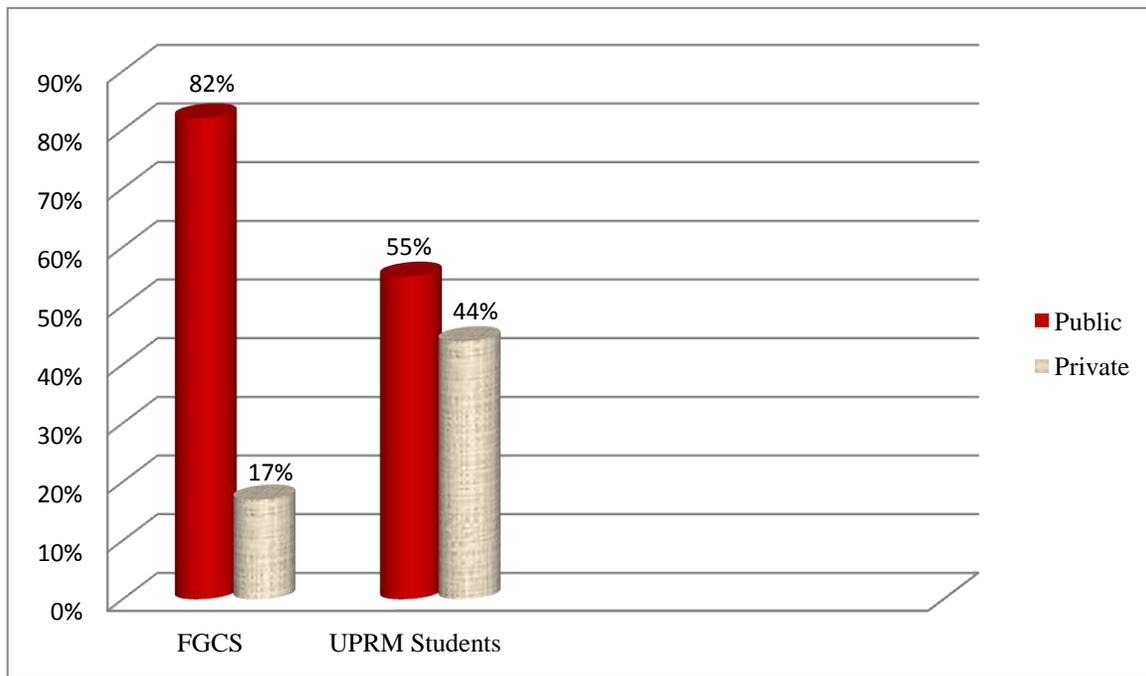


Figure 3: Type of education of FGCS in proportion to UPRM entering population from 2005-2011.

In the final attempt of illuminating how my research targets are depicted on campus, I provide a snapshot of return migrants. In this case, country of birth is used to give an idea of students who migrated to Puerto Rico. Pointedly, I directed my attention to those born in the United States. I am not stating that this is the sole indicator of return migration, but I do want to have a look at comparable traits of my thesis project. Hence, having been born in the United States may imply similar movements my participants and I confronted in our lives. Figures 4 and 5 include percentages of return migrants composing entering UPRM classes as a whole, as well as those represented in the FGCS population, respectively. Once more, it is evident that the number of return migrants who are FGCS is higher in proportion to all of the students. While return migration does not necessarily constitute an indicator of low status, Dika (2010) reviews analyses of the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 that include movement as part of what predicts high school completion and college attainment. She reminds us that moving negatively affects high school graduation and college enrollment.

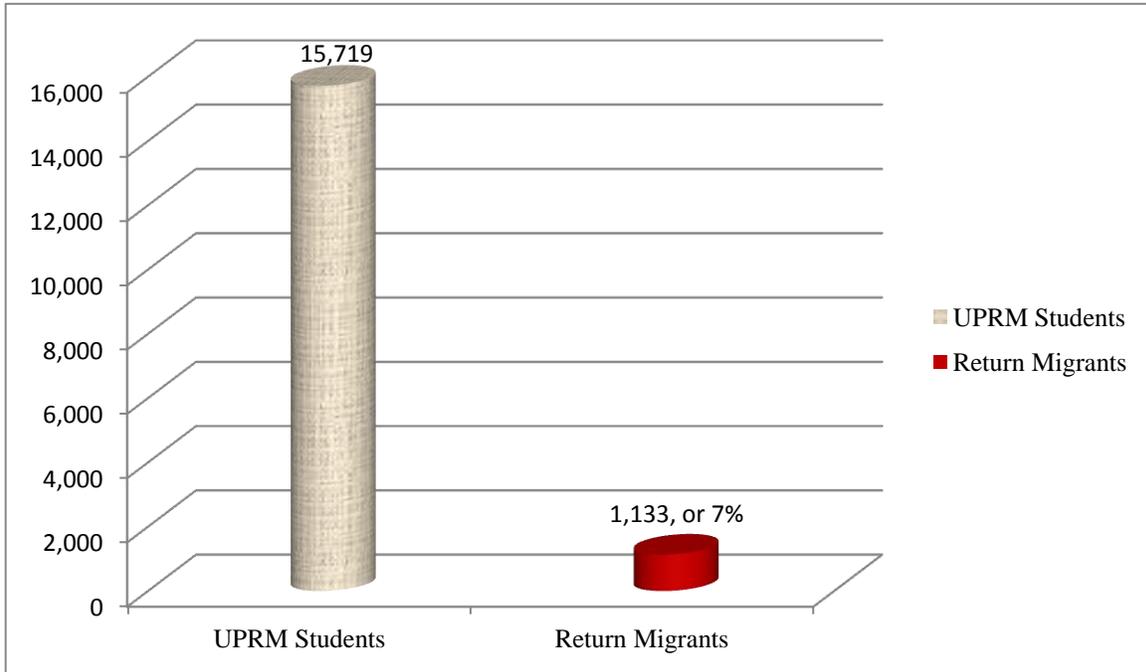


Figure 4: Number of Return Migrants among number of UPRM entering students.

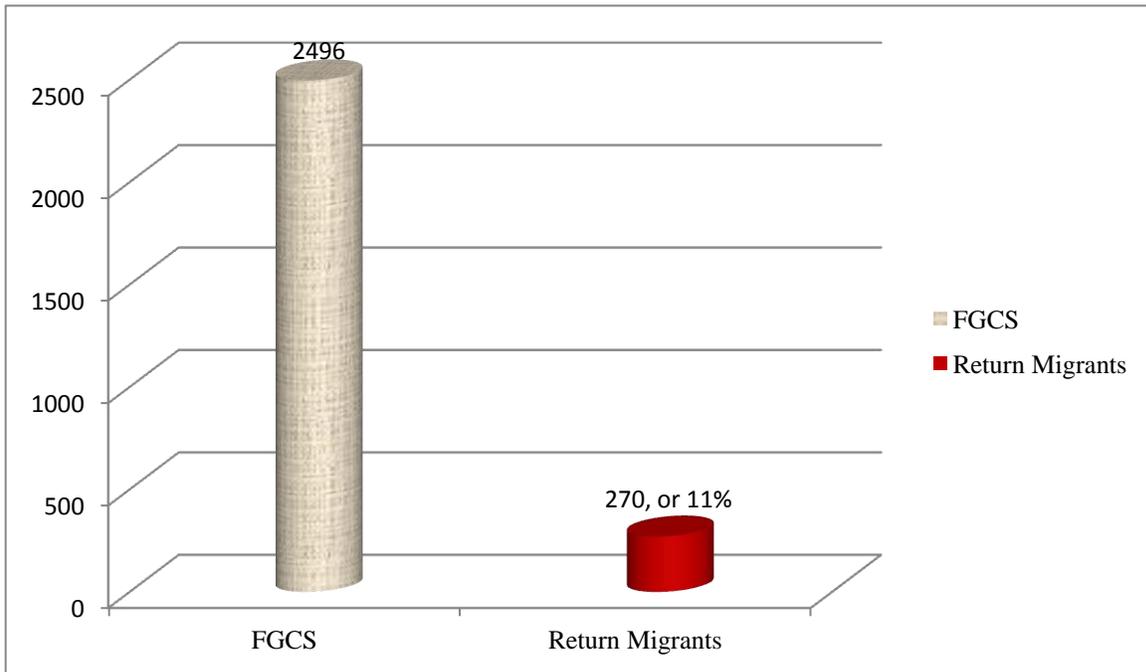


Figure 5: Number of Return Migrants among number of FGCS.

In summary, the statistical data I have gathered coincides with findings of research work done by the CUA with regard to first generation college students; and this is a fundamental part of the literature review. This profile suggests the underrepresentation of FGCS in the UPRM and the lack of understanding them in the context of Puerto Rico.

As a low-income FGCS return migrant, I feel there is a need to learn if indeed being an English speaker guarantees upward mobility, as many had assured me and as some studies suggest. When beginning the search for literature on these topics, I found information about each individual term. However, I have not been able to identify a single study that examines how the language abilities of return migrants who are also FGCS facilitate or impede their college and post-college attainment as well as their perceived social status. To make inroads in this direction I have opted for an exploratory oral history methodology which will enable me to gather first-hand data (defined not as facts but as memories and interpretations of memories) from participants who represent and have embodied these complex phenomena and that can only reach true meaning by those who represent these issues.

It is important to hear the voices of first generation college students who are return migrants and who have decided to venture in the path of higher education. I seek to understand the meaning of their interpretations regarding English within the aforementioned description. In doing so, I will be guided by the framework I unfold below.

Epistemological Stance

There are many routes to the making of knowledge. The direction that best leads the design of this thesis project is one guided towards discovering meanings and the significance of them. Therefore, my epistemological stance is reflected through poststructuralism. Within this paradigm, “language is an unstable system of referents, thus it is impossible ever to capture

completely the meaning of an action, text, or intention” (p. 27). Poststructuralism is crucial in realizing that there is not one, sole interpretation and that narrators are marked by the context in which they construct the meanings of their experiences. My research approach based on generating life histories seeks these kinds of situated and plural interpretations of lived experience. The exercise will allow me to examine if indeed, in the perception of the participants, the English language and English competence are associated with upward mobility, higher status, and personal empowerment. In light of these concerns, it is befitting to model Bourdieu and the forms of capital that he proposes in theory.

Theoretical Lens

As referred to beforehand, Dika (2010) expressly included under the ‘Policy Implications and Recommendations’ section of her working paper that “conceptual frameworks including social and cultural capital would also help to provide more theoretical tools to understand educational inequality in PR (p. 3)”. In taking upon the challenge of doing so, Bourdieu’s theoretical contributions are irreplaceable.

The work of Bourdieu proposes that all human interactions are bound by exchanges between individuals and groups within an economy of practice. That economy is not only affected by the direct flow of currency, but also by origins of social power and control. Such social relationships happen throughout many ‘fields’: semi-autonomous, structured social spaces characterized by discourse and social activity (Carrington & Luke, 1997). As individuals and as part of groups, humans move through fields parallel to the accumulation of capital, of desiring to reach social power and control over exchanges in different fields. Carrington & Luke (1997) add that according to Bourdieu, “the objective social conditions prevailing within fields, along with primary socialisation, results in the development within each individual of the habitus” (p. 100).

They explain habitus as being inculcated from birth; it consists of culture-based and engendered ways of being, seeing, occupying space and playing a role in history.

Within his theory, Bourdieu (1986) analyzes different forms of capital that influence social relationships. These types of capital are economic, social and cultural; the latter being umbrella to embodied, objectified, and institutionalized capital. Symbolic capital is the overarching category that explains how the other forms of capital are played out.

Symbolic Capital Institutionally recognised and legitimated authority and entitlement requisite for the exchange and conversion of Cultural, Economic and Social Capital		
Cultural Capital	Embodied Capital	Knowledges, skills, dispositions, linguistic practices and representational resources of the bodily habitus
	Objectified Capital	Cultural goods, texts, material objects and media physically transmissible to others
	Institutional Capital	Academic qualifications, awards, professional certificates and credentials
Economic Capital	Material goods and resources directly convertible into money	
Social Capital	Access to cultural and subcultural institutions, social relations and practices	

Figure 6: Types of capital. Source: Luke (1997)

As pointed out in Figure 6, economic capital is “immediately and directly convertible into money” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). This encircles material products that are valued in terms of property or cash. Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (1986) as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group” (p. 248). We can relate this to individuals who are part of country clubs, fraternities but also of gangs and support groups. Social capital exists in all rings of society.

Consideration of cultural capital originated while Bourdieu hypothesized about unequal scholastic achievement of children from distinct class levels, instead of an ability that is inherent (Bourdieu, 1986). He notes three categories of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and

institutionalized. Embodied capital is bound to the human being, to a person's body and mind; cultivated by oneself, this type of capital cannot be delegated. Carrington & Luke (1997) describe it as "the composite set of skills, dispositions, practices, knowledges 'embodied' by an individual" (p. 102).

Objectified capital is known as the form of cultural goods that can too be transmitted into economic capital. Examples of objectified capital are the possession of dictionaries, paintings, downloaded music on iTunes, etc. However, it is necessary to explain that the capacity to obtain such goods is obligatorily intertwined with embodied capital. For instance, I can buy the book titled *Blurred Borders* (a product of objectified capital) and decide to give it away as a gift. Yet, I cannot transmit the ability or capacity of buying the book. Institutionalized capital refers to academic qualifications, credentials, and/or certificates conferred to the bearer by institutions of authorities. As Bourdieu (1986) cleverly sketches, this type of capital needs to be objectified in order to receive recognition. What an autodidact may learn on the Internet is not equal to the diploma that a student receives for an online degree of an academic institution.

All of the types of capital that have been formerly discussed respond to what Bourdieu (1986) classifies as symbolic capital. Each and every form of capital – cultural, economic and social – has to be acknowledged and judged as valuable. Bourdieu (1990) argues that "capital is not capital unless it is recognised as such authoritatively in a particular social field". When this is legitimated by all, "their acquisitions results in accumulations not only of the particular capital itself, but also of social prestige and standing" (Carrington & Luke, 1997). It then follows that the notion of class – very existent today – stems from symbolic capital. Carrington & Luke (1997) assert that symbolic capital "describes the social phenomenon of prestige, status and reputation which accompanies the accumulation and recognition of other forms of capital" (p.

103). Extrapolating how Bourdieu's sense of capital is an overarching guide for my study, I will examine how participants' habitus is portrayed in different fields (academia, family households and employment areas) visited by the participants. In addition, the study of economic, cultural, and social capital will let us learn of the shifts that take place on the ladder towards upward mobility.

The merging of Bourdieu's theory and poststructuralism will facilitate the recording and comparative assessment of meanings that FGCS return migrants provide regarding English as "the key" to success and socio-economic power in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, questions of power arise in this study constantly since both first generation college students and return migrants have been insufficiently studied populations in the context of Puerto Rico. Conducting this research has contributed to overcoming this omission.

In summary, this literature review has contextualized the use of English at the UPRM and in Puerto Rico while focusing on the connection of language competence and upward mobility on the island. Moreover, concepts of migration and return migrants have been explicitly provided. An overview of the value of education along with the way in which social indicators of class influence access and success in college sheds much light to the study, especially for first generation college student return migrants, in the context of Puerto Rico. Finally, an explanation of the epistemological stance and theoretical perspective followed in the design of this project was detailed. It is necessary then to document the stepping stones in achieving this thesis project. In the succeeding chapter, I enthusiastically report the methodology that was followed.

Chapter III: Structuring the field: Implications of the methodology

There is something special, unique, moving about the telling and listening of stories. The air fills with numerous emotions and everyone involved starts reminiscing about their own ordeals. A cycle of questions and answers soon transpires until interruption is inevitable. Yet, a conscious or unconscious feeling of having lived – and relived – permeates within the excitement of desiring to continue conversations. A need to ask, remember, respond, give meaning – and possibly closure to – flourishes. At times, things are left alone and forgotten. At others, they are but the beginning of a journey to understand why and how things were and have become, followed by commitments of making a difference where they are needed. The scope of such difference is the least of worries since a genuine interest in contributing should be enough. If we are fortunate, principally in academic settings, these stories are recorded, shared, and analyzed to relate them with concerns and preoccupations of the public, of others who may be living and not telling the same tale. These are the tales I want to tell and that is why I devised case studies as a method for my thesis project.

The Value of Case Studies

In detail, I constructed case studies based on the life histories of FGCS return migrants. Constructed, because as Dyson and Genishi (2005) stress, “cases are constructed, not found, as researchers make decisions about how to angle their vision on places overflowing with potential stories of human experience” (p.2). Indeed, the angling of my vision depended on the interaction of my personal interests with the curiosities already exposed within the basis of this study. Stake (2005) claims that “if case study research is more humane or in some ways transcendent, it is because the researchers are so, not because of the methods” (p. 443). It is the case – that may range from being a person, a classroom, to being a school or employment – that is being studied

and not the method. We can learn about them from different perspectives, in distinct circumstances. I chose to look at the cases through an interpretive viewpoint. I complemented the analysis with quantitative input and I clarify this because although I did not take a mixed-methods approach, I suspect positivist correlation in statistics may have contributed surprisingly in triangulating the data, which I explain further along.

Stake (2005) contends that the term ‘case study’ “draws attention to the question of what specially can be learned about the single case [...] to optimize understanding rather than to generalize beyond it” (p. 443). It follows then that by employing case studies, a rich amount of description is obtained. Therein the process, meanings and contexts of the case are reflected on continuously, allowing the researcher to think and rethink of narrowing and/or widening its angle. The study of cases suited this thesis project well. On the voyage of interpreting how social class is manifested in language and movement on an island with constant struggles of power and identity, qualitative concentration on cases proved critical. Far from generalizing that the cases presented hereinafter represent every FGCS return migrant, I aimed at documenting the phenomenon throughout these cases in particular. I set out to probe how life experiences were shaped for four of the many FGCS return migrants in Puerto Rico. Let me recount how a small stroke of color turned into an invaluable painting. I will start by navigating through the way in which participants were selected and further along, when they became narrators.

Selection of Participants

The key terms that guided my choice of participants for this project are first generation college students and return migrants. My operationalization of the first term included current and former college students as well as people who completed or who began but did not complete

their college degrees. The term return migrants was operationalized with participants who were born in Puerto Rico, moved to the US and then returned to the island and/or Puerto Ricans who were born and raised in the mainland and who had moved to Puerto Rico.

Naturally, since I was in search of participants with distinguishing traits, purposive sampling was employed. In this type of sampling, participants who meet the precise characteristics that the researcher is soliciting are directly chosen (Cohen et al., 2007). The authors note that “in this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs” (p. 115). What Cohen and colleagues (2007) add is essential:

there is little benefit in seeking a random sample when most of the random sample may be largely ignorant of particular issues and unable to comment on matters of interest to the researcher, in which case a purposive sample is vital. Though they may not be representative and their comments may not be generalizable, this is not the primary concern in such sampling; rather the concern is to acquire in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it (p. 115).

No person or entity could better inform this study than those who were insiders themselves, myself included. I pursued maximum variation, defined as Cohen et al. (2007) as “selecting cases from as diverse a population as possible in order to ensure strength and richness to the data, their applicability and their interpretation” (p. 115). Although I mentioned participants should have particular characteristics, differences in age, sex, employment, age at time of migration, migration location, and college experiences were sought to enhance the data and provide even more meanings to our need of understanding.

Yet, finding participants is not a simple task. In order to gain access to possible narrators, I engaged in a number of exciting initiatives. Originally, I had decided to apply snowball sampling, that is, to point out a small number of individuals who had the features of interest. They would then be informants to single out and/or put the researcher in contact with others who met the necessary qualifications (Cohen et al., 2007). But as nothing is fixed in qualitative research, this mechanism was not productive. Therefore, I took advantage of modern technology plus old-fashioned advertisement and sought narrators through social networks, email correspondence, flier distribution, classroom visits, and last but not least, word of mouth.

It occurred to me that in the midst of the technology era, the social network Facebook would be an ideal spot to find potential narrators. Facebook is an online site with a mission to “give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Mission, para. 1) and metaphorically, that is exactly what I desired with my project. I proceeded to create the page titled ‘First Generation College Student Return Migrants’ and invited many of my ‘friends’ to ‘like’¹³ the page. As I am a visual person, the esthetics of the Facebook page worried me. I did not have an image for the profile picture and knew that without one, people would not become interested in clicking on the link. I took it upon myself to create a flier that would serve a dual role: as profile picture and as an instrument of dissemination on bulletin boards and email exchanges.

The Facebook spot allowed for me to post information regarding my prospective project and a reading describing the phenomenon of FGCS. Through this space, and my personal Facebook page, I continuously posted reminders in search for narrators. In a bit of desperation, I

¹³ These words are used on Facebook to refer to the people one accepts/denies into one’s own page, and the action of supporting/not supporting comments, posts, pages, etc., respectively.

advertised my thesis on the ‘walls’ of important digital newspapers, the University of Puerto Rico, the UPRM, university-related pages and on those of important news reporters and journalists. These posts included an explanation of the study, a brief description of how I was defining FGCS return migrants and my contact information. I created an email address¹⁴ for the project so people could write freely, and reluctantly included my personal cell phone number. At first, I did not want my personal number circulating the media or on fliers, but my then thesis committee chair reminded me of the implications in assuming everyone has access to technology; something I knew but had not thought about. At the time of this writing, there are nineteen people who ‘like’ the page, and as a result of the online movement, I only received one (1) email from a person who lives towards the center of the island. She mentioned not being a FGCS return migrant but that she thought her father was. I quickly responded to her message, but never received a response.

Fliers¹⁵ describing my project were posted around campus, sent to faculty members who then forwarded the information to their students, and turned into small cards to be placed on registration tables at a conference. One professor at my department invited me to briefly talk to a group of undergraduate students, although the effort of ‘recruiting’ someone there was unsuccessful. It is noteworthy to mention these efforts, since they consumed more time than I had expected, making me worry, as a student researcher, that I would be unable to find narrators.

But to my satisfaction, at different moments of the stage, eight FGCS return migrants informally responded to my petition, mainly after seeing my continuous posts online and the

¹⁴ fgcsreturnmigrants@gmail.com

¹⁵ See Appendix F for a copy

fliers around campus. Some approached me because I held some type of relationship¹⁶ with them and they knew about my research initiative. Only after I received the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I touched base with the group since approximately a month had passed since we had spoken. I sent an official email explaining what participation in my project entailed and formally asked if they were still interested in embarking on the process. I detailed how the interviews would take place and asked they (if they were still willing) answer an online demographic questionnaire¹⁷. The completion of this form was the next step in obtaining participants and it involved various reminders to each person. Once I received the results, I realized I could conduct research on each case due to the fact that every person – in one way or another – represented something unique. However, that would have generated a plethora of data and consumption of time that exceeded the scope of this project.

As Figure 7 summarizes, I decided to select four participants, equally represented by females and males. Two had been born in Puerto Rico and two in the United States. The former reported English as their native language while the latter selected Spanish. Actually, one of the participants who was born in the US mentioned English as a native language, although it had shifted with the changes in the person's life. The age of the participants at the time of movement ranged from 8 years old to 28 years of age and the initial location of movement varied. Each individual held distinct employment positions at the time of the interviews and had reached a range of education levels.

¹⁶ Friendship, school and/or work-related.

¹⁷ The online questionnaire was created, sent, and analyzed through Survey Monkey. A copy of the original Microsoft Word document is available in Appendix G

Pseudonym	Gender	Place of Birth	Native Language	Age Range	Year of Moving	Age at Moving	Occupation
Lucky Boy	Male	PR	Spanish	56-65	1979	28	Retired from Military
Michelle	Female	PR	Spanish	56-65	1952	8	Administrative Secretary
Sunny	Male	US	English	26-35	1991	13	Graduate Student
Sofía	Female	US	English Spanish English	46-55	1972	12	PhD

Figure 7: Participants selected for thesis project.

Once the four potential narrators were selected, I sent follow-up emails that informed them of their selection and that requested confirmation for future interviews. After each person confirmed, I sent a thank you email to the remaining four who had initially showed interest. Although they wouldn't be interviewed, I expressed wanting to keep them in tune with how the project was coming along. I'm happy to say that all of them have continued asking me about the progress and are eager to learn of my findings. I have sensed, indirectly, that they too needed these stories to be told.

But as we like to tell our stories and learn from those of others, in an educational setting, a number of concerns emanate regarding ethical issues. Allow me to comment on how I strove to assure the most ethical path possible.

Ethical Matters

I assumed this research project would render many ethical issues for future narrators. First of all, I submitted a revision request form for a research project to the authorizing office at the UPRM known as the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The approval¹⁸ to conduct my research was the official way in which my project was certified as implying minimal ethical

¹⁸ See Appendix H for a copy of the IRB letter of approval.

implications; minimal in the sense that there is always a risk when working with human beings. At the personal level, I was aware that establishing confidence is not something individuals are accustomed to do with people they have barely spoken with. The fact that I personally knew each of my narrators beforehand may have helped them trust me, minimizing possible tensions. In addition, I shared with them, to some extent, my own experiences of being a FGCS return migrant. This strategy follows what Yow (2005) voices about having a new perspective regarding the relationship of interviewer and narrator. Now, she says, “power may be unequal, but both interviewer and narrator are seen as having knowledge of the situation as well as deficits in understanding” (p.1). This allows for an interview perceived more as a conversation in which collaboration is invested and where I, the researcher, was considered one of them. Interestingly, I must admit that although I was the interviewer, I am unaware if the narrators perceived me to be the person with power. However, I do recall not feeling more powerful in this situation. I felt intimidated many times without being able to express the reason. Notwithstanding, I connected with each of my narrators soon after the interviews started. The rapport grew between us in such ways that we conversed over several topics; bringing tears to our eyes, long silences, but much laughter as well. I accentuate here my position on the role of participant vis-à-vis narrator. What makes my thesis project exceptional, as with all oral history contributions, is the willingness of people to narrate their most cherished intimacies. I respect the valor of those who did. Much more than just participating in a study, they gave birth to the narratives included here. I find using the term ‘narrator’ much more respectful, appreciative, powerful, and yes, ethical.

Likewise, I knew that by tape-recording the interview sessions, there would be ethical implications as well. A consent form was provided, not only to grant permission, but also to make clear how the information would be used and archived for confidentiality. Anonymity was

bound by the use of self-selected pseudonyms for each narrator. Finally, engraved in my mind remains the mere fact that I was trustworthy of knowing episodes few people have come to know. The moment I felt I had achieved the most sense of ethics was when I was confided an incident that was not to be included in the data. Off-the-record literally meant off the record, off the transcript, off any intention to be analyzed. At that moment, only the narrator and myself relived the secret inside a closed office. That is where the secret stayed. I was the confidante in other places as well, making the research site diverse.

Research Field and Duration

I utilize the term ‘field’ contrary to ‘site’ because there was no fixed location in which the research was conducted. In this sense, my fieldwork took place in areas such as the narrator’s homes, a closed conference room and personal office at the UPRM, and even at a public restaurant. I had always set forth that I would make the process of greatest convenience for my narrators; hence, meeting at localities and times that best suited their needs. The closest I traveled was 10 miles and the farthest approximately 42 miles.

For the proposal of this research project, I anticipated a length of 6-8 weeks to complete my fieldwork, aiming at successfully doing so during summer while I was on vacation. The actual amount was 7 weeks within a time span that started mid-June and ended mid-August. During this time frame, the first five weeks were very active followed by 3 weeks of being unable to carry out fieldwork. The two weeks to follow finalized the research period. In the next section, I convey how the data for this research project was collected.

Data Gathering

The data collected for my thesis project originated from three sources. First and foremost, in-depth interviews were conducted as a means to capture testimonies from the narrators of this study. In second place, institutional data from the UPRM was requested and analyzed to obtain statistics that offered a profile of FGCS return migrants on campus. Granting that I included the data statistics in the second chapter of this document, I will not repeat what it suggests. Nevertheless, I need to express why I consider such data part of the gathering and not just a justification in the literature review. The information I was interested in retrieving is criteria that appears in the UPR application form. This information is entered into a database managed by the OIIP. Upon request, this office provides raw data to researchers. In order to learn how FGCS are represented at the UPRM, I had to invest time and effort in analyzing the results. Now, they are not just raw data, but official statistics that were obtained through this study. The third source of data was an exchange of ideas and feedback between each narrator and I. After recreating their stories, I met with them to share the findings I had obtained after analyzing their stories through theory.

As I previously mentioned, in-depth interviews were chosen as the ideal way to collect data. Within its gathering, I recorded the life histories of my narrators. I deemed oral history quintessential for this project and I explain why in the section below.

Research through Life Histories

When providing a working definition for oral history, Yow (2005) explains that it is “the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form” (p. 3). She continues the explanation noting that the term life history has been used interchangeably with oral history. Similarly, terms such as self-report, memoir, testament, etc., are also used to refer to oral histories. The rise of oral history in the United States dates back to the 1920s and although its interest declined due to

doubts of validity (Goodson, 2001), by the 1960s “an interest in recording the memories of people other than elites became paramount among academics” (Yow, 2005, p. 3).

These memories can be part of stories that are too part of a larger life history (Goodson 2001). In a fine attempt to explain Goodson and Sikes’s approach between the difference of life story and life history, Bathmaker (2010) states the following: “life stories may be a starting point, the initial exploration of a life as lived, but life history grounds these stories of personal experience in their wider social and historical context, and pays attention to social relations of power” (p. 2). For the purposes of my thesis project, I follow this definition; I believe that it fits properly since many were the stories that marked each narrator’s life history.

Portelli (2006) asserts that “oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (p. 36). In the process of such explanations, vivid and descriptive narrations are accounted for. The use of life histories is the threshold towards the thick description that Merriam (1998) defines as “the complete literal description of the incident or entity being discussed” (p. 30). In questioning the truth of what narrators say, the extent to which memory helps or does not, and the validity of the narrative, my take is that the life histories recorded for this thesis project are as true as each narrator understood it to be at the time of each interview. My position seems to follow Portelli’s (2006) statement:

But what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators’ effort to make sense of the past

and to give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context (p. 38).

Given the theoretical standpoint guiding my study, I employed life histories to record the recollections and interpretations of experience of nondominant sectors of the Puerto Rican population. I intended not only to illustrate how necessary (not only sufficient) oral sources are for the history of the nonhegemonic classes, but to contribute in leveling them up to that of the ruling classes. This way, the control that the latter have had over writing can be widened to those who have not had the opportunity to leave behind such abundant written records (Portelli, 2005). After narrators had accepted to be part of the study, I explained how their cooperation in this research would make history in the context of this study in Puerto Rico and that the efforts are toward a more equal system of education for all. This exemplifies the importance of oral history, since participants became the main characters, allowing their histories to shed light on relations of power regarding English in Puerto Rico.

Journeying in the adventure of interviewing required a vast amount of planning, much more than it actually took to take part in the interview sessions. Because I had gained information through the demographic questionnaire, I had begun to learn more of what I already knew about my narrators. This allowed me to shift the original design of unstructured and semi-structured interviews to what seems most comparable with one of the outlines produced in the work of Patton (1980): standardized open-ended interviews. Yet, I am still not convinced that any of the three completely represent the types of social encounters (how interviews are at times perceived) I participated in.

Cohen et al (2007) provide a review of Patton's proposition and state that characteristics of standardized open-ended interviews imply "the exact wording and sequence of questions are determined in advance. All interviewees are asked the same basic questions in the same order" (p. 353). While I agree that the strengths of this type of interview include narrators responding to the same questions, being able to compare narratives, and that the data is complete for each person; I disagree with the fact that this interview permits little flexibility in relating myself to certain individuals and circumstances. I admit to have created an interview protocol in line with the research questions that guided my project. This enabled me to have answers to each question from each narrator, and in majority, I asked them exactly as they appeared on paper. But non-standardized information became available many times since much flexibility arose within the protocol, something uncommon in structured interviews as well. I feel obliged to inform that, following Cohen and colleagues (2007) description, I followed a less formal interview "in which the interviewer is free to modify the sequence of questions, change the wording, explain them or add to them...where the interviewer may have a number of key issues which he or she raises in conversational style..." (p. 351).

I conducted 2 interviews with 3 of the narrators and 1 interview with the narrator who was able to meet only after summer had passed and after many intents in establishing a date. The initial interview with each of the 3 narrators ranged from 2-3 hours while the second interview was approximately 1-1 ½ hour. The only interview I conducted with the fourth narrator was near 5 hours long. In total, the interview process took almost 16 hours. This amount of time does not include the planning of the interview protocol, creation of the demographic questionnaire; nor does it represent travel and chit-chat that occurred before and after each interview.

The hours of tape-recorded interviews resulted in 449 pages of verbatim transcript that I produced in about 64 hours. This quantity does not include investing time in ‘cleaning’ the transcripts, inserting punctuation marks, pauses, etc. The transcripts were crucial in trying to reconstruct as best I could the narrator’s life histories. The analysis was done looking through a Bourdieuan lens. Before revealing findings accordingly, I find it pertinent to delve deeper into the other aspects that formed part of such analysis.

Data Analysis

After concluding the transcription stage, I adventured in using Atlas TI (a qualitative data analysis and research software) to start codification. The data analysis began by open-coding, that is, “to sift through and categorize small segments of the fieldnote record by writing words and phrases that identify...” (Emerson et al, 1995). I named a bit more than 100 codes, many of which related to the research questions due to the initial interview protocol. However, many codes emerged as a consequence of natural conversation about topics that were not part of the questions. Of the totality of codes, I identified patterns that had been continuous in each narrator’s interview and throughout all sessions; those related to language, migration, social class, and the role of family and friends were major findings and I provide some examples as follows in Figure 8.

Main pattern found	Definition	Examples of selected codes related to main pattern	Examples of narrator's quotes
Language	Representations (experiences, proficiencies, competencies, discourse, etc.) of English and Spanish throughout a narrator's personal, academic, and/or professional life.	English Linguistic Practices Spanish Linguistic Practices English as Key?	"I wanted to stay here in Puerto Rico. I wanted to learn the language here, and English was a problem to live here. I didn't need English here (in Puerto Rico)."
Migration	Descriptions of movement, changing places and identities and the consequences in the narrator's life histories.	Movement Changing schools Cultural Shock Questioning Identity	"It was like going from city life and all of these commodities and amenities to the Stone Age. I just can't explain it any other way... It was a shock. It was a total cultural shock in all of its manifestations."
Social Class	Narrator's portrayals of having been poor, struggles with differences in socioeconomic status in college, and perceptions of success.	Being poor Class Differences Upward Mobility Enablers	"We didn't have nothing to eat. We suffered, we didn't have nothing to eat. We didn't have electricity cause we couldn't pay."
Role of Family and Friends	Depictions of family and/or friends and how they influenced narrator's lives and higher education experiences in positive and/or negatives manners.	Family Descriptions Positive Family and Friend Roles Negative Family and Friend Roles Partner Relationships	"Ellos (padres) estaban contentos porque yo iba a la Universidad. Me recuerdo, mami me compró una sortija de graduación de High School. Tuvo que reunir chavos para comprármela."

Figure 8: Main patterns and definitions found through coding, along with selected codes and quotations.

This coding exercise guided the reconstruction of the narrator's life histories, which I present as a timeline and in the form of testimonies. Beyond analyzing the testimonies per se, I preferred to voice their experiences as FGCS return migrants. After accounting for them, I used their narratives to answer the research questions and make sense of new information. This design

is similar to what Flores (2009) creatively presented after interviewing many of his participants in his recent study about return migrants in the Caribbean.

Even though I formerly shared my position about how true the contributions of narrators are, I briefly add how validity concerns will be attended to.

Methods of Validation

Cohen et al. (2007) note that in this type of research “validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher” (p. 133). I am confident that honesty was the basis of each narrative and am sure the depth, richness and scope are highly evident. The narrators that gave birth to this project had genuine intentions to tell their stories of being FGCS return migrants and I was very interested in hearing them. As the researcher, I am compelled to disclaim that I was not objective in the sense that I followed a poststructuralism approach. As every research includes some percentage of autobiographical work, indeed I made assumptions at times. However, I did not let these assumptions interfere with the data.

With regard to validating my research through triangulation, I utilized the individual interviews, statistical data, and the discussion of the findings with the narrators. These three mechanisms allowed me to examine different perspectives in order to engage in a deep, nuanced and plural interpretive process of the participants’ experiences.

I have provided a thorough explanation of the methodology that guided this thesis project. It is time to shift from writing about narrators to getting to know Lucky Boy, Michelle, Sofía, and Sunny. The next section offers a portrayal of their lives as first generation college

student return migrants. A timeline of major episodes summarizes each individual's life, followed by their first person narrative. Both instruments seek to complement one another and to display who they are as best possible.

Chapter IV: Narrator's life histories: At a glance and in depth

I have continuously stated that it is important to hear the stories of those who barely have the opportunity to have their voices heard. I find that the best way to introduce the narrators of this research project is to allow them to do it themselves. This will allow us to better understand what may be causing the phenomenon of the statistics I offered in an earlier chapter. While those numbers were important in generally representing FGCS return migrants in the UPRM, they can never account for specific meanings in ways in which life histories do so well.

Before continuing to read their narratives, I first show a snapshot of each person's life. At a glance, major episodes are quickly identified to years as approximate as the narrator could remember. While I aimed at helping the reader understand the complexity in each life history, I believe that even this fragmented timeline does not account for the best representation of their life experiences. Therefore, oral history methodology continues to demonstrate its importance in trying to close the loop, make connections, bring together different episodes, descriptions, and meanings to personal and public matters.

The focus of this chapter is to present the narrator's life histories to the best of my ability and in a way in which their voices can truly be heard. In the next chapter, I analyze how the stories that shaped their lives tie together with notions of capital and success.

These are the reconstructed tales of Lucky Boy, Michelle, Sofía, and Sunny; four first generation college student return migrants who share with us personal, academic, and professional memoirs that have greatly influenced them.

Lucky Boy: El Inmortal¹⁹

DATE	IMPORTANT EPISODES IN LUCKY BOY'S LIFE
1951	Born in Puerto Rico
1969	Married for the 1 st time
1970	Graduated from high school
1967-1970	Worked in summer jobs
1970	Received college scholarship for being an athlete
1970-1972	Began college in a major that would lead to medicine
1971	Had 1 st child
1973-1975	Transferred and continued college studies in Physical Education
1975	Completed bachelors degree
1975-1979	Worked for a private company
1970-1979	Participated as an athlete in national and international competitions, representing Puerto Rico
1979	Quit participation in the Pan American Games and leaves the Olympic Committee
1979	Joined the Army at the age of 28
1979	Divorced 1 st wife
1980	Bought 1 st house in Oklahoma
1983	Married current wife
1985	Had 2 nd child
1986	Had 3 rd child
1989	Bought land property in hometown
1990	Received recognition in his hometown at the <i>Galería de los Inmortales</i> for his performance as athlete
1979-1991	Competed as an athlete in representation of the Army
August 1999	Retired from Army at an E8 level and moved to Puerto Rico
2005	Bought land property close to hometown
2006	Purchased house he currently lives in with his family
2012	Has envisioned moving back to the United States

¹⁹ Lucky Boy's narrative is purposely in Spanish because he requested speaking in Spanish throughout the interview.

“El que quiere, puede; no importa en la situación que se críe. Hay gente rica que no llega a ningún lado; personas hijas de gente rica que no llegan a ningún lado. Y hay gente que no tienen nada y sobrepasan todas esas vicisitudes de la vida y salen hacia adelante, teniendo nada.”

Tengo sesenta años de edad y nací en el 1951 en un barrio pobre de Yauco. Soy una persona tranquila, buena, a quien le gusta ayudar a los demás. De los siete hermanos soy el mayor. En mi infancia, recuerdo que éramos bien pobres, bien humilde. Vivíamos en una casita de madera techada de zinc. Pasamos ciertas situaciones donde había veces que no teníamos comida y comíamos carne los sábados nada más o los domingos. Siempre desde pequeño sabíamos que éramos pobres.

Cuando éramos niños, mis hermanos y yo éramos unidos. Pero luego que llegamos a adulto, se rompió todo. Cada cual cogió pa' su lado. Cada cual hizo lo que quería hacer. Hasta cierto punto, yo seguí los pasos de mi papá en el deporte. Mi viejo era un jugador de beisbol; jugaba Doble A. Un día vinieron a firmarlo de Grandes Ligas. Cuando firmaron a Chago Rosario, que era de Ponce, vinieron a firmar a mi viejo. Pero mi viejo bebía mucho alcohol y cuando vinieron los escuchas lo vieron tirado en el piso con una borrachera. A él le dieron un homenaje después de viejo para exaltarlo al salón de fama de Yauco, a la Galería de los Inmortales. Él no lo quiso pues dijo: *“yo arruiné mi carrera así que no me merezco ningún homenaje”*. Yo hubiese hecho lo mismo también. Afortunadamente mi camino fue distinto y pude recibir el reconocimiento como Inmortal.

Yo representaba a Puerto Rico en competencias internacionales, específicamente en 400 metros con valla dentro de atletismo. Parte de los mejores recuerdos de mi vida giran alrededor del atletismo. Recuerdo que una vez dieron unas eliminatorias y yo fui a todas. El lunes siguiente compré el Periódico El Día, abrí a la parte deportiva y ahí estaban los nombres de los atletas que participarían en los Juegos Centro Americanos Universitarios en México. Yo me puse a leer,

bien nervioso, hasta que vi el nombre mío. Cuando llegué al mío yo dije: “¿seré yo?” Yo sabía que era yo porque yo era el único Lucky Boy que corría, pero de momento dudé. Ese viaje a México fue la primera vez que viajé pero después participé en muchas competencias, todo pagado por el Comité Olímpico. Estuve en Rusia, Jamaica, Francia, Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba, Santo Domingo, Guadalupe, San Tomas, Bahamas, Trinidad y Tobago e Inglaterra. Siempre nos llevaban a pasear, a visitar diferentes sitios y siempre íbamos por 15-20 días. Ahí uno podía observar similitudes y diferencias entre países. Recuerdo los Centroamericanos en Santo Domingo; mucha gente pobre, bien pobre. Habían cientos de personas alrededor de la Villa Olímpica pidiéndonos comida a nosotros en Santo Domingo. En México también vi eso. A pesar de ser una ciudad desarrollada, un país desarrollado, en el mismo centro de México habían muchas mujeres con niños chiquititos pidiendo dinero en las calles. En Cuba también eran bien pobre. Cuando fui allá, vi una pobreza extrema. Ver eso me hacía sentir bien mal. Viniendo de una familia humilde, me di de cuenta que habían más pobres que yo. Pero aparte de ver esas condiciones de pobreza, las experiencias fueron buenas. Por ejemplo, recuerdo que en Rusia, Moscú me encontré puertorriqueños de Ponce. Eran buenos momentos. En todos esos viajes de atletismo nosotros los atletas nos entendíamos, fuera el idioma que fuera. Nunca tuve algún contratiempo en comunicarme, pues el lenguaje universal era el lenguaje del deporte.

El deporte también fue el puente que me llevó a la universidad. Yo sabía que era pobre y que mis padres no tenían para darnos una buena educación. Como no podía depender de ellos, me metí a atleta y salí adelante. Recuerdo que cuando me gradué de la High School mi madre quería regalarme una sortija de graduación y no había dinero. Ella trató y buscó y hasta cogió chavos presta'o para comprarme la sortija. Y me la regaló. Yo me sentí muy bien pero sabía que eso había sido una excepción.

Yo pude entrar a la universidad porque recibí la beca de atleta. El Director del Departamento Atlético fue a la graduación y me la ofrecieron. También fueron personas del Colegio de Mayagüez pero yo escogí ir a la universidad privada. No sé porqué, pero en la privada, me inspiraban más confianza.

Recuerdo que los momentos en la universidad fueron gloriosos. Creo que por ser atleta las experiencias fueron siempre muy gratas. A nosotros todo el mundo nos respetaba. Una vez se formó un motín en el Centro de Estudiantes; era de los Independentistas, sacaron bates, cuchillos y todo eso. El Director del Departamento Atlético, quien era una inminencia se metió allá dentro para calmar a esa gente. Cuando nosotros los atletas vimos que él se metió, nosotros corrimos todos para allá a defenderlo a él. Los Independentistas cogieron y se fueron todos. Ser atleta era bueno. Antes era un orgullo ser atleta. Nosotros íbamos con tanto orgullo a representar una institución y representar a Puerto Rico. Estuve nueve años de atleta hasta que me empezaron a incomodar ciertas cosas del Comité Olímpico. No me gustaba que la gente se aprovechara de nosotros.

Para ese tiempo empecé a pensar en otras alternativas para mejorar mis condiciones de vida y decidí ingresar al Army. Cuando yo me fui, yo era mejor atleta que en ningún tiempo. Yo había progresado tanto en atletismo y cuando yo lo dejé, los del Comité Olímpico me dijeron que no me fuera. Les dije que ellos no me darían lo que yo necesitaba porque yo tenía una familia y necesitaba ganar dinero y tener un hogar. Yo hubiese participado en los Juegos Panamericanos en Puerto Rico en el año 1979; yo gané todas las eliminatorias para participar. Aunque ya yo había dicho que me iba, quería participar en esa carrera. Recuerdo que le dije que el Army me estaba pidiendo una carta que certificara mi participación en los Juegos Panamericanos. Él siempre me decía que me la iba a dar pero nunca lo hizo. Así que me fui para el Army porque no

tenía que buscar más nada de nadie.

Yo siempre había querido ir al Army pues mi abuelo fue veterano. Lo logré hacer en el año 1979 y me sirvió de escape en ese momento. Del ejército también tengo gratos recuerdos pues soy quien soy hoy gracias a eso. Mi participación en el Army me llevó a viajar a muchísimos estados incluyendo a Hawaii. De todos los lugares, ése es el que más aprecio porque ahí nacieron mis dos hijos. Vivir en Hawaii es algo parecido a vivir en Puerto Rico y ahí pude hacer muchas amistades.

Además de los viajes, el Army me permitió aprender inglés. Yo no usé ese idioma tanto cuando fui a la escuela. Mientras estuve en la Universidad, sí tuve que leer libros en inglés pero nunca lo usé al nivel de conversación. Estando en el Army tuve que aprender el buen uso porque el español no estaba permitido. Recuerdo varias ocasiones en la que me regañaron porque estuve hablando en otro idioma. Siempre reconocí mi error pero siempre explicaba que ese era mi primer idioma y la manera en la que más cómoda me sentía al expresarme. Aprendí suficiente inglés hasta para dar clases dentro del ejército. Fue un proceso de mucho aprendizaje en diferentes facetas de mi vida y pude escalar mucho.

Al momento de retirarme, mis hijos querían vivir en Puerto Rico para aprender más español del que ya hablaban en la casa. Decidí regresar a la isla pero no es donde quiero vivir. A mí me gustan muchas cosas de la isla, la música jíbara, la cultura y la comida. Pero siento que aquí no hay respeto. Me molesta vivir aquí por eso. A mí me gusta más la vida americana y estoy esperando que mi hija diga que se va a estudiar afuera para podernos ir, pues mi hijo ya vive en Estados Unidos. Eso es lo único que estoy esperando pues ya mi vida está hecha.

Hoy día reflexiono en las experiencias que tuve y en las oportunidades que aproveché. Creo que fui exitoso en mi vida. Mi familia y yo tenemos todo lo que necesitamos. Todo lo que

me propuse lo logré.

Michelle: The Hard-Working English Fanatic

DATE	IMPORTANT EPISODES IN MICHELLE’S LIFE
1944	Born in Puerto Rico
1952	Moved to New York when she was 8 years old
1959	Had 1 st child when she was 15
1960	Had 2 nd child
1961	Graduated from high school
1961	Worked in a supermarket until she was laid off
1963-1964	Started working in a private company for many years
1960s	Took accounting courses during the night while working full-time
1971-1972	Employed in a real estate office
1970s	Bought a house in Queens but quickly sold it
Early 1970s	Worked as a part-time cashier while working in real estate office since she needed income to cover her expenses and those of her children
1974-1975	Married owner of grocery store per mother’s advice that he was wealthy
1975	Moved to Puerto Rico
1975	Had 3 rd child
1975	Divorced after living with husband for short time in Puerto Rico
1978	Mother died when Michelle was 34
1975-1980s	Worked in a pharmacy in Puerto Rico
1980s	Married estranged friend who had sought to find her
1980s	Moved to California and works in a photography lab
1980s	Bought house in California
Late 1980s	Sold house and moved back to Puerto Rico
1992	Worked in an office at the UPRM covering an employee’s 2-week vacation
1992-1993	Completed a certification in a technical school
1993	Started working in an administrative position at the UPRM
1994	Husband passed away
1995-2003	Completed a bachelors degree in Business Administration at the age of 59

“I’m such a fanatic with English. I love languages. I wish I could know five languages.”

I was born in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico in 1944; I think I’m 35 but I’m really 65! I would say I’m a hardworking person who is friendly, honest and caring.

As much as I remember from my childhood in Puerto Rico, I was so happy. I was with my mother, father, grandparents, and my aunt all living in one house. I think we lived in a poor neighborhood ‘cause I remember at night when we would turn on the TV, a lot of kids would come around. I remember watching TV right outside the living room and little kids watching from outside. But even though it was like this, everyone worked. My mother and my aunt would help my grandmother sew gloves, scarves, and handkerchiefs. My father used to work in a big grocery store and my grandfather would sweep up the streets. He would make his own broom with coconut plant. We would all work. They would all work so I guess that’s why I’m a hard worker. They would give us good gifts. We would get the best things.

Things changed once my mother moved my brother and me to the United States. We fled the island seeking to hide from my father. This was painful for us because I loved my father very much. While I was a child in the United States I never had toys. My clothes were from the Salvation Army. I never went to a movie. I never had new clothes until I started working and bought my own. With the food, *nosotros nos comíamos un hot dog* maybe once a year or maybe something like that. *Si no, comíamos más que harina y cosas así. No sé si pasamos hambre*; I don’t remember that. But it was hard. We never had money for sodas or toys. *Yo recuerdo mami me regalaba más que una muñequita* or something like that for Christmas.

When we lived in New York, we went through many hard moments. But my mother managed to put us in Catholic schools because she wanted the best for us. Being in that school was hard sometimes because we were of the few Hispanic students. Not only did we have to experience a bit of racism, but it was hard because I was scared of not knowing English. I was

able to learn English and soon I became the interpreter for my brother and mother. She didn't know English and he was still learning the language.

I remember living in New York and having people mistake me for being Italian. At the beginning, I did not correct them because I did not want to be associated with Puerto Ricans who were not doing anything productive with their lives. It wasn't until many years later, that my son's teacher talked to me about heritage. I asked her how my son could learn English better since he was born and raised in Puerto Rico until he was six. That teacher told me to stop speaking to him in Spanish. She told me to only speak English to him, and it worked. But she also made me think because she explained the difference of speaking and of who we really are. I remember her telling me to never deny who I really was, to not deny my background or my heritage. From that day on, I always said I was Puerto Rican.

Once I graduated from High School I decided to put aside my dream of continuing to study so I could help my mother with expenses. During many years in my life, I obtained different job opportunities. One of my favorites was when I had to travel when new stores would open, in representation of the company. The need to work was a must because I was already a widow with children. If I lost a job, I quickly found a new one. During this phase in my life, I went back and forth from the States to Puerto Rico until I decided to stay on the island. I had found a job in a pharmacy and had come in contact with a lost friend who used to like me. Years later, I married him and had my third son. We decided to move near one of my older sons in California because things in Puerto Rico were not going well. After living and working there for about 5 years, my husband asked me to return because his parents became ill. I did not want to at the time because I always liked living in the States. I agreed and have been living in Mayagüez since. The job hunt did not end. I had some opportunities but it was not until I spoke with people

at the UPRM that things became more positive. I was advised to take secretarial courses and I did so in a technical school. This experience, added to my proficiency in English, landed me a permanent job on campus.

I remember being very nervous for the interview because the supervisor was a very important professor who had held an important position on campus. The day of the interview, I remember parking far away, walking a lot and arriving very tired. But he received me well and we clicked right from the beginning. I was honest about the fact that I did not know Spanish well enough in writing but I told him I could manage speaking and reading it. This didn't worry him, he just wanted to make sure I knew English. He even said he could show me Spanish! I loved working with him, starting that new program. Those were the best days of my life working here. I worked every part of the office and I felt so important. We did activities, invited speakers to the University, and I was in charge of making sure they felt welcomed. Many of the speakers were American. I always found myself explaining things about Puerto Rico to them and to other Americans when I would travel. Many did not know a lot about the island and would ask about currency and green cards.

I'm not working with the same supervisor or the same office anymore. Unfortunately things change and people come and go. I was moved to a department that needed a bilingual secretary as well. It took a long time before I got the permanency, but I did. At my current job I use a lot of English although I use Spanish to communicate informally. I feel as though I serve as a translator for a lot of people.

Part of the benefits of being a full time permanent employee is that I was able to study. That dream that I had put aside so many years ago reappeared. After doing all the paperwork, I started studying again. It was such a great feeling! I felt young all over again. It took me around

8 years to do my bachelors degree because I registered few courses during each semester. But I was just as proud, and so were my children! They looked up to me, having been able to accomplish this at the age of 59. I always talked to them about the importance of college. My two older sons are in the Navy and the Marines. My youngest one says he was never good with books but holds a full time job in an important store in the area.

I think my experiences helped me be a resource for others. I remember when my youngest son married an American girl. She lived with us for a while and not only did I help her get a GED in Puerto Rico, but I motivated her to do a technical course at the same place I did. They divorced some time later and now she's back in the States with my grandson. When he comes to Puerto Rico, I take him around, I show him everything Puerto Rico has but I can't get him to talk a lot of Spanish. Also, many of my family members look for me when they need help. They say I'm smart because I studied at the UPRM and because I know so good English.

Having a college education has changed who I am and what I want for myself, especially when meeting a partner. I have become much pickier after experiencing college. I want to have someone that can talk about different things, about the world. The person needs to have common sense and want to improve in life. I have had some negative experiences in my relationships. That is the story of my life. But I have decided that I am okay with being alone.

I'm happy how my life turned out and grateful for having completed a bachelors degree.

Sofía: The Eternal Teacher

DATE	IMPORTANT EPISODES IN SOFÍA'S LIFE
1960	Born in Chicago
1972	Moved to Puerto Rico at the age of 12
1978	Graduated from high school
Summer 1978	Worked in a summer job to save money for college
August 1978	Began college at the UPRM in Business Administration and participated in the work/study program (did not complete degree at this point)
July 1979	Married boyfriend who had always motivated her to go to college
August – December 1980	Requested transfer to another department but was rejected due to lack of vacancies
October 1980	Started seeking job opportunities while considering dropping out. Began working part-time at the mall
December 1980	Dropped out
January 1981	Worked full-time at the mall
1982	Had 1 st child
1983	Got contacted to offer English training in private company; is convinced of quitting her job by the organizer. After resigning, the organizer did not obtain the contract and she was unemployed
1983	Employed as language tutor in a private company
1984	Employed in area of quality control in the same company, after having served as language tutor. She then was laid off.
1984-1985	Obtained a certification in technical school
1984	Had 2 nd child
1984	Bought land property outside of Puerto Rico
1985	Started selling beauty products to generate income
January 1986	Taught in the same technical school where she was certified
September 1986	Applied for readmission at UPRM in the same major (Business Administration)
January 1987	Returned to UPRM to study and worked during the weekends in what she had been certified to do in the technical school
December 1989	Obtained bachelors degree when she was 29 years old
Fall 1989	Had miscarriage of twins and mother confronted health problems
January 1990	Sought teaching opportunity in technical school again, after approving several credits in Education but was not hired
January 1990	Taught in private university for one semester
Summer 1990	Continued seeking employment while she worked in her house in order to have an income. She would sew, iron, sell beauty products, and work in what she was certified
September 1990	Started working in an administrative position in a department at the UPRM. She continued to sell products and work at home during the weekends

February 1991	Stopped working at home due to pregnancy, temporarily
August 1991	Had 3 rd child
August 1991	Bought house in Puerto Rico
January 1994	Took a Study Leave without pay and began her Masters degree
June 1994	Had 4 th child
Summer 1994	Decided to completely stop working at home, except if it was for her immediate family
December 1995	Finished coursework for Masters
1995	Participated in dance festivals
January 1996	Returned to work in department at UPRM. Was promoted although she had not finished her degree
September 1998	Offered courses related to her Masters degree at the UPRM (for additional compensation)
December 1998	Obtained Masters degree
1998	Purchased land property
June 1999	Participated in commencement at UPRM
December 1999	Had 5 th child
1996-2001	Continued to work in department, with a higher administrative position
2001	Resigned to administrative position
2001	Was employed for teaching at UPRM
2002	Left Puerto Rico to pursue doctoral studies
June 2007	Finished her PhD at the age of 47
August 2007	Purchased house in the United States
August 2007	Began teaching in Puerto Rico
December 2007	Purchased another house in Puerto Rico
2002-2007	Took courses to obtain a different certification
After PhD	Started taking courses through Professional Development for another certification
2011	Participated in different projects related to her PhD
June 2012	Will finalize purchase of another house in Puerto Rico that already produces rent
2012	Is envisioning the purchase of an additional house in the same town she works in

“Had I been born into a smaller family or a family with more means, I probably would’ve moved ahead quicker. Not better but quicker. Because of all the stopping, trying to balance finances, trying to help out others as I was moving forward; again, carrying all these people with me so they could move forward with me, it slowed me down but it didn’t make me lose my stride.”

In 1960, I was born into a large family of eight other siblings in the town of Chicago, Illinois. I consider myself to be reserved and I tend to project myself as shy. I’m very creative and I like to work with puzzles. Anything that is complicated or difficult for other people, I take it on as a challenge and enjoy working it out. While living in Chicago, I have many memories of the two neighborhoods I lived at. The place I grew up in was an area populated by lots of Puerto Ricans. There were two groups of gangs and both were of Latin origin. It was a fairly dangerous place to live in, given that these two gangs were always fighting against each other. The schools were about three blocks away. I started off in a public school for the first three years. Then my parents put us in a Catholic school because things were beginning to get rowdy.

One of the memories I have of that school was terrible. I was made aware that I was different and I was Puerto Rican very, very early on. The uniform was red and black and we had to use a Peter Pan blouse. Since my mom was working, I didn’t have a clean one so I used a long sleeve blouse. When I got to school the nun stopped me in the hallway and said I wasn’t uniformed. I told her I did have a white blouse but they wanted the uniform. When I was asked about not having it, I said I only had one and that I hadn’t washed it. She sent me off and then on the speaker system the principal called out for anyone who had extra clothes. She said it was needed for a very, very poor Puerto Rican family in the school. My siblings and I knew they were referring to me because there were no other Hispanics there at the time.

I didn’t know I was poor. I was happy. That’s it. I had a lot of people around me that loved me. We had a big family, brothers, and food. We had music, we had fun, and everything

was great. However, I did become aware of our economic situation when we moved to Puerto Rico in 1972. Although our house was cement and everybody else had wooden houses, at the age of 13, I still couldn't grapple with the fact that the sink was outside of the kitchen. And then because we lived on the farm, at school, anybody who lived where I lived was *del monte*. That was something that was frowned upon.

My childhood was very hard. I had to deal with the cultural shock between the United States and Puerto Rico. I also had to adjust to language use. I was struggling with Spanish but beginning to forget my English. I remember there was something similar to dual language programs. We would place the radio on top of the TV, lower the volume of the television and look for the dual language transmission on the radio. We'd turn the radio up and listen to it in English. We did this in order to continue learning English. By then we were getting radio stations that were playing more American music so that also helped. And I had a friend at school with who I held a language friendship. I would correct her English and she would correct my Spanish. I think that is why I was able to obtain such proficiency in both languages.

Besides always wanting to return home, my childhood did not feel like a normal one. Because I was one of the older daughters, I had many responsibilities in the household. I remember that my mom didn't allow me to take Comercio in High School because the girls from Comercio had to study all day. She wanted me out of school at noon because I had to take care of the kids. I was in interlocking so my dad would stop by the school to pick me up, go home to eat and drop me off. Then my mom could do the things in the afternoon. I had to do the cleaning, help with cooking, and help with all the kids. I had to skip school many times to watch my sisters and brothers so my mom could go to appointments. Yet, I always managed to do my homework.

While I was in High School, I secretly had a boyfriend. I couldn't tell anyone at the beginning or else I'd be pulled out of school. After some time, I did confess to my mother but it only got my parents more upset. I made sure my grades continued to be As but it wasn't enough. They didn't like the fact that he was from *el Pueblo* and that, in their opinion, he was not a hard-working kid from the farm. I continued to date him and although they did not like it, they did allow him to visit me sometimes. Once he started talking to me about college, the communication with my parents severed even more. They thought he was putting crazy ideas in my head and were always against me applying to college. All of the motivation and assistance I received was from my boyfriend. He was the one who helped me realize the benefits of going to college. He was the person who first believed in me and told me I was smart and that I could get admitted to el Colegio. He took it upon himself to be in charge of the application process because he was afraid the application wouldn't get to where it needed to be. My boyfriend was the person who took me to take the College Board. I remember crying all the way to Mayagüez and back because my mother had threatened me to not get inside his car. But I did. And regardless of the tears, my scores were great. I wasn't invisible to the school administrators anymore after they received my file, although the principal mocked me after asking to meet with me.

I followed my boyfriend's advice and went to the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. I wish my college experience would have been better but I couldn't get over the fact that my parents did not support me. In addition, I had realized that being in college was so difficult for me since I was poor. I dealt with housing and transportation problems and with regular complaints from my parents. When I returned to the house on the weekends, I had no time to study and I was still expected to help out around the house. Week after week after week I went through the same ordeal. After becoming tired with what I was going through, and seeking an

escape for improvement, my boyfriend and I decided to get married while I was still in college. Of course, my mother did not approve, but it was too late. I had gathered money and prepared everything without telling anyone. Because she was due for labor, my parents did not go to our wedding. Getting married did not work as I had expected. I always had my husband's support but I just couldn't cope with everything I was facing. I decided to drop out of college promising I would finish my degree in the future. My husband always made it clear that I needed to obtain my college degree.

During the period in which I was out of the UPRM, I gained several experiences. Everywhere I went and everything I did revolved around teaching. People would always say they saw me as a teacher. I did a degree in a technical school, worked at stores, taught English in a private company, took Education courses, and finally decided I wanted to return to college and finish my bachelors degree. Although I was unhappy with the major, I wanted to finish what I had started and that I did. I had learned good study habits and was making an income during weekends, so money wasn't such a big problem anymore.

After about 10 years, I obtained my bachelors degree in Business and found employment at the UPRM. I have fond memories of the years I worked as an employee on campus. My use of English landed me interviews with high paying salaries, but I opted for one that paid less, but that offered a permanent position with several benefits. One of the benefits was having the cost of further coursework covered. This allowed me to continue graduate studies in the area I felt passionate for: teaching. Even after so many years when I was already an adult, my parents always influenced my education experiences. They never supported me in what I wanted to do. Luckily, my husband was always there to help.

I obtained my masters degree when I was 39 and had the opportunity to live in the United States while pursuing a doctoral degree. At the age of 51, I feel I have done everything I wanted to do. I have my own children who have gotten tremendous academic experiences, and a husband who has stood by my side all of the way. I feel fortunate for having acquired so much, even if it took me so long. I think that people tend to see me different because of the degrees I have earned. But I'm still Sofia. I don't throw the 'doctor' part out and I don't like my family to use it either.

I enjoy the fact that I have become a resource for my parents and family. I scraped my knees and paved the way for many other women in my family who later decided to go to college. The discourse around a college education changed within my family. It still hurts to know that I had been so criticized for what people are now being applauded for. But I'm glad they have decided to improve their life and lifestyle. There are no excuses.

Sometimes, just sometimes, I will remember the past and still hurt. The 'no's' I had to face made my life experiences so much harder and I haven't been able to entirely overcome that yet. My relationship with my parents has improved during the later years of my life but I think there are wounds that still need healing. I believe I am in that process.

Sunny: The Perennial Student

DATE	IMPORTANT EPISODES IN SUNNY'S LIFE
1977	Born in Chicago
1991	Moved to Puerto Rico at the age of 13
1995 – March 1997	Began college in private university (did not complete degree)
March – August 1997	Worked in father's business
August 1997 – September 1998	Started studying at UPR
October 1998 – Summer 1999	Returned to private university (did not complete degree despite obtaining excellent grades this time)
1999	Dropped out
Summer 1999 – January 2000	Worked in father's business
January 2000 – September 2000	Obtained certification in Technical School during the night while working in father's business
September 2000 – Summer 2001	Worked in father's business
July – September 2001	Worked in company related to technical degree
September 2001 – January 2002	Worked in father's business while waiting for next semester to begin
January 2002 – January 2003	Decided to study at UPR again (same campus as 1 st time) while working in father's business
March 2002	Worked in Fast Food (coursework and grades were affected)
January 2003 – July 2003	Worked in a private company
April 2003	Met partner (who he currently lives with)
August 2003	Studied at UPRM through a special permission. He was still a student in a different UPR campus
January 2004 – December 2007	Officially became student at UPRM and studied degree in the Arts.
2007	Obtained bachelors degree
2008 - 2009	Started a certification in technical school
2008 – 2010	Took courses through Professional Development at the UPRM
August 2010	Began Masters degree and has worked as a Teaching and Research Assistant
2012	Has envisioned pursuing doctoral studies in the future

“Right now I look back to all these years of studying and I see that it wasn’t time wasted. I did not waste my time. There’s a lot of what I know today because of that information. I think I became a better student after studying in the University of Puerto Rico.”

I never imagined I would go to college. Being born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, it just wasn’t part of our family conversations. When I think about Chicago, I remember having a pretty rough childhood. We didn’t have that much at all. My father only made around \$300 a week and the rent was around \$600. That left \$600 to buy groceries for a family of five, pay bills and everything else. Besides feeling as though I was poor in the United States, it was tough because of some of my father’s decisions. He was a business man type of person. Every year he would buy a house through government housing laws. Constantly having to move took a toll on me. Every time I would move to another house, that meant I’d have to move to another school district. I’d have to move every year. The school districts were pretty close to the Hispanic area of the city. I grew up with a lot of Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites. In school, there was more white (people) than Hispanics. All the teachers were white, no exceptions, all white. Now that I reflect on those experiences, I realize I had been discriminated against by teachers because I was Hispanic. Now, at the age of 33 is that it continues to be clear to me.

I also remember the routines in which dad would take my sisters, my mom, and I out on weekends. We would go to English and Spanish services at church, eat at the same pizza place, and then we’d go home. We would watch samurai movies and that sort of stuff. That is what I remember about Chicago. If I were to return right now, it would be like a new city because it was in 1991, when I was 13 years old, that we moved to Puerto Rico. My father was laid off from his job after being blamed for an accident at work. After that, he decided to come to Puerto Rico because he already had a house here. I remember when he told my mother we would move. I

came home one day from school and my mother was cooking. But when entered the kitchen, there was just food everywhere. She was crying so I guess she was not into the plan of coming to Puerto Rico. She had already tried that in 1985 when we stayed for about 10 months. She didn't want to do it because she knew what was going to happen. The last time she came he left her and the family in Puerto Rico and he went back to Chicago to work. She didn't like that separation. When we returned, my mother decided to quit her job to finally be with the kids. We always had someone to come to because my grandma wasn't at home with us. Since my mother decided to be a stay at home mom, when my father decided to move us to Puerto Rico, it wasn't really a decision. My grandmother had a house on the west side of the island so we stayed with her because we had to rehabilitate our house.

I think my parents were always connected with Puerto Rico so the decision to move became easy. Although my dad wasn't born in Puerto Rico, my mother was. She moved to the states with her family when she was around 15 or 16. My parents knew each other from before because they were cousins. When she was about 27 years old, she decided to get married. In recent conversations with her, I was surprised to hear that she hoped to return to the States some day. I think it was because she had a different lifestyle over there (in Chicago). She had a better social life. These differences were very evident.

I noticed that when we moved to Puerto Rico, other things began to change as well. One example was politics. Along my house there was this long caravana and people with their blue, red, and green flags. I would ask them what it was about and they explained politics to me. My parents were never involved with this in the US but now they were because it was so easy to vote. All you had to do was cross the street. We used to live across the street from the school in which I studied, in a rural area. Things were very political and all of it was very new to me. I

later learned that the green flag meant independence. Thanks to an agriculture teacher, I came in touch with the history of Puerto Rico and with the love for my *patria*.

Another thing that changed was my identity. I always had issues with my name. My family and teachers would call me by the English form. I was so unconscious of my name that when I signed my social security card at the age of 10, I signed the English form, not the way it appears on the card. That's who I thought I was; at home they call me by the English version. Teachers did not know how to pronounce the Spanish version correctly. When you're a child, everything is normal for you and I thought that the way to pronounce Sunny was like that. When people had trouble pronouncing it, I would pronounce the English form. Since everyone was having such a hard time, I told them to call me Sunny. I hated the English version anyway. Getting to use Sunny was a new thing for me, a very new thing. At home they still call me like that. But in school and in church, they call me Sunny.

Language use was not the same after we moved. I think I was raised being bilingual, I mean, my father speaks English and my mother speaks Spanish. But it wasn't until I lived in Puerto Rico that I really had to learn Spanish. In the States, I would make fun of the Mexicans when they would write phonetically in English but then I would be doing the same thing over here with Spanish. My use with English was never really a problem. Even after moving, I recall doing okay. I remember getting some feedback in a writing course at the Institute of Children's Literature. They said my English was college level English. When somebody, especially a director of another institution in the United States, tells you that you have college level writing, you feel good. I guess I was honored when they told me that because I did not have High School in English; just up to eighth grade. But I had continued writing stories in English.

Much of my story does revolve around language. It's always been this language deal with

me. Many of the choices that I have made have had to do with language. When I decided to go to college, I had many interesting experiences. I struggled with language so much in the university setting that I stopped studying architecture. In part it was also because I did not have good study habits. But it also was because of language situations. So in my many years in and out of college, I had become a computer technician, I did my associates in Arts but I didn't get it for a diploma, and I became specialized in one of my hobbies. Then of course at the end, I obtained a bachelors degree in Spanish. As time passed, I felt different when I was getting older than the rest of my classmates, but this did not stop me. After a while I thought I should go back to what I was because in Spanish I was still not good enough. So now, I'm working on a masters in English. I'm returning to my native language that I had denied for some time.

Another major difference when we moved was that my father opened a furniture business store. He started selling a lot in 1994 and I would work with him. I think my advice helped him with future sales. Having a business allowed him to help in financing my college education. But we came to a point where the business was going terrible. There was a day where I thought *"we're not going to have dinner tonight because we don't have anything to eat"*. *La pasé todas*; up there, down there, moments of having a lot of money and having nothing at all. I remember that the first time we moved to Puerto Rico, we had to take food stamps because my mother wasn't working. But it was the second time when he started the business. That is probably why people always did say that I look or acted like I had money. But I think of myself as a poor man. I'm poor. That's how it is. Even today, I'm a poor man living with somebody else who has money. I know it is not what is expected of me because of my age, especially when I get compared. My father loves it so I do it on myself. I'm constantly thinking of what I expect from myself but also of what others expect from me. This happens regularly in my relationship.

My partner is from a higher social class than I am and his mother kind of treats me like a poor man. At times I got intimidated. I realized our differences in class when I first walked into his house. I feel fortunate though, that I do not have things that slow me down. That's how I look at it. I prefer not having anything. I don't have to pay the bills. I don't have to pay a mortgage. I can do anything with my life. But I must admit that part of my decision of doing amasters degree and possibly a doctors degree had to do with leveling up to their status. With him it was like if I wanted to be more accepted in his family, I needed to have something to back me up. I did not want to completely go into the masters. I wanted to specialize in my hobby, but of course, you have to spend money to make money. So I just thought of going to college, doing the traditional graduate study, getting a good job and forgetting about the rest. I decided to keep this as a hobby. Right now the career choices that I make are more in the line of sticking to what I started. In the long run I will have the financial stability that I may be looking for.

At the beginning I felt bad because I had made so many changes in my college years. I think I may have given up too quickly. It was just a matter of time. I could have done it. I would have been okay if I would have stayed. I remember regretting a lot of choices that I had done. That made me feel like I was a bad person. I don't know why. It was a way of looking back at myself as a failure when I did those changes and did not stick to my own plans. But then I noticed that I'm not a failure if I'm still on my way to becoming a success. It would be different if I dropped out of school and had left so many things that I started and did not finish.

Now I understand the value of having gone to college. Sometimes I see that people feel they're better than their parents 'cause of university. I just feel better than my parents because it was more like I became a person. I didn't rush into life. I feel I took my time to do the things at the time that they're supposed to be done. I think it was maybe the first contact where I was

treated as an adult and expected to be an adult. In college is when you can give opinions, you have somebody who's really going to sit there and listen to you. That's where I had the chance to be heard.

I think college helped to figure out who I was. College life is very sheltered and it's a chance to become independent, while still having some dependency. But at college is where you find yourself. I think that much of that time that I did spend on creating myself, of who I was, helps me today, especially when people ask "*what did you do with your life?*" That question would have been hurtful if I did not have a degree. Having spent 8-9 years studying to then say I didn't have any degree would have been bad. When I did finally study and I did get my degree, it felt good.

Sometimes I think about the relationship with my father and how his choices affected my childhood. Having to move from school to school is probably the reason I love making friends but why I don't know how to really keep the contact today. I also like being alone. I never had that trust to actually talk to somebody, spill my guts out till 2005. I met somebody and he was in shock when I actually told him that I never had a best friend. He just didn't understand why or how someone can go without that. So he was more like my teacher in friendship.

Continuing with the changing of schools, I think it came to a point where I was comfortable with or wanted to change. There was always a need for change. As a result, I may never belong to a certain place. I don't have a home-base. My whole family is on the northwest side of Puerto Rico so maybe I would have to say that would be like home because it's not Chicago anymore.

Summary of Narratives

As we have seen thus far, each narrator has lived different experiences in Puerto Rico, the

United States, and in college. These narrations have been shaped by what I consider to be particular factors that were similar among each life history and that directly and indirectly intertwine with Bourdieu's forms of capital.

In addition to responding to the research questions, the next chapter delves deeper into how migration, language, social class, and the role of family and friends influenced personal and academic events in the lives of the narrators.

Chapter V: Socio-cultural factors impacting higher education and life experiences

In understanding the meanings that Lucky Boy, Michelle, Sofia, and Sunny gave to their life histories, it is necessary to relate them to socio-cultural affairs that happen among relations of power, as suggested by Bathmaker (2010). I have found that various factors were determinant in shaping their lives and their higher education: migration, language, social class, and the role of family and friends.

Migration: “Once I moved to the States my life changed and turned around for the worse, at the first years.”

As I have shared before, two of the narrators of this study were born in Puerto Rico and two were born in the United States. While Lucky Boy decided to move after he was an adult, the others were young when they moved as a consequence of their parents decisions. The narrators share what it was like to change places:

Lucky Boy: [Describing when he moved to the United States to join the Army] “It was difficult because I had to leave my family over here (Puerto Rico). I left alone. It was also difficult because of the language. I did not know a lot of English when I went over there. People had a different culture. Over there (Missouri) people were from the countryside and people do not live so close together. Here (Puerto Rico) it is more familial; people like to get together more often and that was a big difference. So, I felt even lonelier because I did not know anyone.”

Michelle: “So then he goes, “*you can take the boy but I want to keep the girl here.*” She said, “*no I’m not gonna separate them just because you got married, remarried. That’s your problem.*” So he says to her “*well you’re not taking them out of Puerto Rico.*” She said okay. She was a very fearful woman but she was very intelligent. So one

day I noticed she told us “just ask the *bendición a tu papá y tu mamá.*” And she went over to my father and says “I’m gonna take the kids to the movies.” And to the movies it was that she had purchased tickets and she took us to the States without nobody knowing. Then from there we went to the airport and I says “*my God, where are we going?*” My brother kept looking out the window saying “*oh my God and this and that.*” I really did not know that we were in the States. But I remember it was very cold when we got there. Our coats weren’t enough and we had to stay at the airport. I remember getting sick. It was a very bad move for us because I remember being at the airport many days and we suffered a lot. I guess the plans that she had didn’t work out and we had to move with somebody, a co-worker of her. It was very bad. After a while we got thrown out of the place because over there you have to have in the lease whoever lives in the house. Maybe there was really no room for us and we had to move from there and we suffered a lot, we really did. I must have suffered a lot because of that. I’m sure and so did my brother ‘cause I mean, separation for anybody is bad. I must have suffered a lot. Plus, we were like hiding ‘cause we didn’t know anything from my father for almost 9 or 10 years.”

Sofía: “My mom sold it to us like we were going on vacation. I had no clue it was a one-way ticket. I wasn’t able to tell all of my friends, and so basically that was it. Although I did have their telephone numbers, we didn’t have a phone where we moved to. It’s in a *barrio* or ward and it’s pretty high up there in the mountain. I remember driving down from San Juan all the way to the town and the roads would get smaller and smaller until we hit a dirt road; and that was it. And then that was

the house. It's my grandmother's *finca*. It was a coffee farm and it was 20 acres. All of the family lived on the farm. It was like going from city life and all of these commodities and amenities to the Stone Age. I just can't explain it any other way. We had no water and so they showed us where the well was. We had to walk down and it was about a 7 minute or 8 minute walk. I had to learn how to balance a bucket on my head and then carry two gallons on my hands if I wanted to drink that water. And then for the clothes there was no washing machine. I said "*oh my goodness so where do you wash the clothes?*" Then they took us to the little creek and I said "*no, no.*" So we had to carry our dirty clothes all the way down, wash it, come up and then hang it up. It was a shock; it was a total cultural shock in all of its manifestations. And then the family, they knew no English. So we could only speak English among ourselves. And then the Spanish that they knew, it was different. It was different from what I had heard in other places. It was a dialect."

Sunny: "It was tough because I'd already become accustomed to adapting of course (because of moving a lot in Chicago). It was just the same ole, new school, new people to meet. The only difference of course was that everybody spoke in Spanish."

Migrating between the island and the mainland did not just cause changes of place, but also of identity. All of a sudden for some, and gradually for others, the narrators were not who they thought they were. After being asked if they considered themselves Puerto Rican, the uncertainty of identity unraveled as follows:

Lucky Boy: "Well, I am Puerto Rican because I was born in Puerto Rico from Puerto Rican parents. When I lived over there (United States) I always considered myself Puerto

Rican. But I am American because I was born in the Americas. I am Puerto Rican. I am Puerto Rican...almost American. I prefer the American lifestyle. The Americans have respected me more than Puerto Ricans have. They (Americans) treat me better. And I want to be American. I want to live in the United States.”

Michelle: “I consider myself Puerto Rican but I always wanted to be there in the States. And when I go to the States, even on vacation, I feel like I’m home. Many times I will say home. ‘Cause once I read something like that *“that no matter where you were born; where you were raised is what sometimes you really feel that you belong.”* I read that somewhere. And it applies I guess to a lot of people.”

Sofía: “I don’t know, that’s a very good question. When I was in the states, they would call me La Polaca. Everybody else was Puerto Rican, La Prieta. They had all of these nicknames but I was La Polaca. And then I would ask and they would say that I was very, very white. I will figure it out somewhere down the line. When I was doing my PhD, I would say I’m from Puerto Rico. In one class it was really interesting. The professor took upon himself to take away my Puerto-Ricanness. So I would always say I come from Puerto Rico. And then the next question, the next present question no matter where, *“but your English is so good.”* They would ask *“You were born in Puerto Rico?”* and I would say “No, I was born in Chicago.” They would respond “oh no, then you’re American.” And so, in a second, everything was taken away. It made me feel bad because I did feel Puerto Rican when I was there. And I know the culture and the music and the food. And I married a Puerto Rican and my mom and dad are Puerto Rican and I’m Puerto Rican and my children are Puerto Rican. And so who does she think she is to, in a

snap of a finger, say “*oh no, no, you’re American.*” And then I said “*wait, wait.*” I kept quiet but inside I said “*no, no, you can’t do that.*” So from there on in the class I was treated as anybody else. The other thing she said was “*you don’t look Puerto Rican.*” And I would get that a lot. I would get “*oh you look like one of us.*” And I would go home and just think about that for several days. “*You look like one of us.*” And I said “*it doesn’t feel right; it doesn’t feel right because of the way it’s said.*” But then again, in Puerto Rico soy la gringa, soy la blanca. In school I was La Gringa, La Nuyorican, La Chicorican or anything else.”

Sunny: “Being an English speaker pulled me more into being an American and less being Puerto Rican when I was over there (Chicago). The way I saw it was that being Puerto Rican was for older people. When I moved to the island, I didn’t see it that way anymore. I think I consider myself Puerto Rican. Yeah, I think because in Chicago I was very discriminated for being Hispanic.”

Differences in identity also surfaced when the names of Michelle and Sunny were changed to their English form. Since they were very young, they explained how they accepted being called by a different name because at the time, they thought it was normal and just wanted to be accepted. After many years, they have once again embraced the Spanish version of their name – which of course is their real name and suggests who they really are. I find it interesting that they did so only after returning to the island and/or because the importance of respecting names was pointed out by someone else.

Having to cope with issues of identity and (dis)placement were just part of what return migration entailed for the narrators. Each of them mentioned desiring to return, to be back where they had once called home. This led to confronting a very difficult transition process, as kids and

as adults. Part of what may have caused the need to return may have also been the fact that the narrators felt discriminated against. While within the data racism did not arise as an influential factor in their lives, they all shared stories of having felt negative treatment due to the fact that they were Puerto Rican. Many times, Lucky Boy found himself having to defend his Puerto-Ricanness, being scolded by superiors in the Army, but also being applauded for having faced his American critics. Regardless of how Puerto Rican and American he describes himself, he always mentioned the importance of being respected, especially when it came to matters of who he was and where he came from. Furthermore, it was interesting to hear how some described fellow Puerto Ricans. Many decisions that Michelle and Lucky Boy made had to do with the fact that they did not want to be around Puerto Ricans that lived on welfare, did not work, and were disrespectful, among other reasons. These perceptions may suggest that they too held some type of discrimination against others as well. Being a return migrant, living between spaces within Puerto Rico and the United States, also had an impact on the language the narrators communicated in. The next section shows how problematized language use was for return migrants.

Language: “I did speak Spanglish for a long time and that was a bad thing.”

During their youth, all of the narrators had different levels of contact with a second language, whether it was English or Spanish. It is important to learn about such contact and their perceptions of its use before migrating:

Lucky Boy: (Describing the use of English in Puerto Rico.) “Before I decided to go to the Army, I thought I wouldn’t have to learn English. I was not interested at all in English. At school, the classes they gave were like *lápiz*-pencil, *pluma*-pen. That’s how it used to be. Maybe now-a-days you’re taught conversational English at school but before

they would not teach conversational English. It was only he, she, father, mother, things like that. Then they would take a picture and you would say “that is *pollito*-chicken, *gallina*-hen. There was a lot of repetition. I didn’t like it. I wouldn’t learn anything, just two or three things, that’s it. I thought it wasn’t necessary for me to learn English. Then I went to college and had books in English. I’d have to use a dictionary and try to read whatever I could. I learned a little in college but it wasn’t enough to start a conversation over there in the United States with someone else.

Michelle: (Describing the use of English in Puerto Rico). “At times my father would take me to work and sometimes I would hear this language. I would go close to the person and I would say “*my God, the language is so beautiful. I wish I’d know what they were saying.*” I always liked the English language but I don’t remember learning English in school in Puerto Rico.” (before moving to the United States at the age of eight).

Sofía: (Describing the use of Spanish in Chicago). “When I was in Chicago I learned. I could listen to Spanish because my mom loves music. She had a lot of music. And we would have a lot of parties at home and a lot of family would come. Every other weekend there would be people at home. Every time somebody came from Puerto Rico they would stop at our house. Everybody would come in and that was the meeting place. I was able to hear and understand the language. I remember my first attempt to speak in Spanish was when we were walking down to the school and there was one of the gangs. I looked at my brother and I tried very, very hard to speak Spanish. Because I was so white, I was afraid that they might mistake me for something else. I didn’t want anything to happen to me if they thought I was gringa.

But then my brother says “*nena tranquila*”. He was with us to help out in any event that anything would happen. But nothing ever happened to us. I guess they knew who we were.”

Sunny: (Describing the use of Spanish in Chicago). “I think I did grow up bilingual. We would go to a Spanish church. My grandmother, the one who used to take care of me, she didn’t know English. I think I did have that as an advantage, of being exposed to Spanish. But it was negative, being bilingual, knowing Spanish. We couldn’t use Spanish. It was against school policy. You could speak Spanish at home or at church, not at school.”

As we can see, a second language was present in every case but besides Lucky Boy’s experience, it was not imposed at the beginning. Having to use it then did not represent fear; rather it was something natural and even exciting, as was the case for Michelle. Yet, gone were the days in which they only spoke their native language. The time had come for them to use a language they barely had contact with and to do so in formal academic settings, as shown below:

Lucky Boy: “When I got there (to the United States to begin in the Army) I said “now I really need to speak English. I simply started listening to people talk and by making many mistakes. That’s how I started. Then you get used to the language too. But at the beginning, it was out of necessity. Interest arose after because then I felt more confident when I was learning little by little.”

Michelle: “I was worried about the English language. I said “*but mom, I don’t know English.*” She said “*just say, when they talk to you, I don’t know English.*” I said *okay*. I think those were the first words I learned. For a while I was afraid. And that’s why I used the term “*no, I don’t know English.*” But after a while I said, “*I’m not going to keep*

doing this.” I wanted to learn English. I don’t remember how exactly that I learned English at that time. After that, I wasn’t afraid anymore. I said “*no, I want to learn this language ‘cause I like it and I want to communicate with my peers, my school.*” In school I wanted to communicate with my friends.”

Sofía: “One of the things that happened to me when I got here was we didn’t have people to talk to. That was 1972; television was in Spanish, lots of Mexican movies. We had this hunger and this anxiety of keeping our language. And so it got to one point that I didn’t know a lot of Spanish and I was forgetting my English. I was quiet for the longest time. I was frowned upon because I wasn’t from here (Puerto Rico). It was very hard, very hard trying to fit in because of the language barrier. When I was half way through seventh grade, somebody came from New York and we became friends. She was different because she was in and out of New York and Puerto Rico so she would do really good with both groups.”

Sunny: “My project was learning Spanish when I got here (Puerto Rico). They gave me a dictionary so I had old dictionaries. And I remember this was my first experience with reading novels. I came here to Puerto Rico and they hand me the *Llamarada* by Enrique Laguerre. I read the first page like twenty times and I didn’t get it. I didn’t understand anything in Spanish. So what I did was, I just started reading dictionaries, you know, English, Spanish, and then I had my Spanish-Spanish. I looked up a word that I didn’t understand in the book. But then, the definition of that word had other words that I didn’t understand. So I was forever reading the dictionary to finally figure out what this word meant. It was a lot of work and I

never, in high school, finished a novel completely. I would always get stuck like half way.”

The use of English and Spanish did not only shape the lives of these return migrants, but they greatly influenced their college experiences as well. Lucky Boy recalls the use of English at the private university where he studied:

I never thought that English would affect my studies in college. Now there are more books in English; before there were not a lot when I entered. I was only interested in English in order to understand what the textbook said. It (English) improved a little. If I would have started college knowing English, it would have been different. I would have read the textbooks without any comprehension problems. I had a C in English; that was the lowest grade I had over there (Private University). Actually, I had a D and then brought it up to a C and that's where I stayed. In the other classes the books were in English, but those subjects, like Biology, interested me. I would go to the library and use a dictionary. I understood some words, I would understand them. But it is more difficult to use English in a conversation than to read it. I understand everything I read in English. But speaking it is different.

Lucky Boy remembers knowing classmates in school and in college who knew English because they had just arrived from outside of Puerto Rico. At times, he sought help from them in order to finish coursework and when asked if he considered his friend to have advantage because of his English proficiency, the narrator answered:

Well, it was easier for him to understand the textbooks in comparison to myself. He didn't have to go through so much work. I would have to do more while I looked for words.

For Michelle, her once native Spanish was the language she had to struggle with while earning her bachelors degree. Since she moved to New York at the age of 8, she became accustomed to using English primarily. The encounters she had with Spanish are explained below:

I took the College Board and I did very good but in Spanish not too good. I was worried about the writing of it. In speaking I'm pretty good and in reading I'm okay too, I have no problem with that. Casi todos the professors that are in Spanish son así "*pronunciar bien, ser bien fino, hablar pausadamente.*" That would always scare me a little, but mostly the writing. I always had a lot of things bad because of the age y los acentos. Y me decían que si los esdrújulas, que todo eso. I never learned that. To me that was so complicated. I have learned it because of the use of the words, let me put it that way; no porque algún día lo aprendí así por las reglas. Never learned that. I was always scared. I'm always scared and even up to now sometimes. The words don't come fast and I would like to say something really nice y "*oh my God, ¿cómo se dice esto? Espérate, translation, qué sé yo qué.*" It scared me a little many times.

Sofía states that when she went to college, she was pretty proficient both in English and in Spanish and gives an example of how she used language in this setting:

I was good in both and had thought about English when deciding to go to college. As a matter of fact, in the Biology class, you had the option of getting the book in English or in Spanish to study for CIBI. I would always pull it out in English. And even if the terminology was in English, I would always go for English.

Sunny's recollection of Spanish use in college seemed to be the most problematic:

My Spanish was very poor still, even though I was able to write and read. I was a functional illiterate. I could read but I didn't understand half the things I was reading. My English, well, it kind of stayed in this eighth grade bubble. It was like to be proficient in English was to be deficient in Spanish. I really didn't have a balance yet so I still was very deficient in Spanish in my first years, very deficient. I would use code-switching. It was a bad thing to code-switch because then people would ask what you said because not everybody knows English. When I would code-switch or speak in English they would ask me to say it in Spanish.

When Sunny decided to apply to college, he purposely thought of a major that would not require much use of Spanish. To his surprise, things did not result as he had expected:

I thought that maybe by drawing I didn't have to use Spanish that much but I was wrong. Every time I did something I had to present it by explaining my ideas orally and in writing. All of these things demanded language again and it frustrated my studies in architecture because of that. I made the decision of studying Spanish and then continuing with architecture. It didn't go that way. The whole college experience with Spanish was more about belonging. It was tough because Spanish is my second language so I was always criticized for the accents. I was constantly being corrected for my misuse of language because the Spanish that I did know was spoken Spanish.

While it has become evident that Spanish proficiency is crucial in order to continue college studies at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez and at a private university, it is also clear that knowing English alone does not guarantee academic success. However, English served as an important resource for those who were proficient in this language. Michelle, Sofía, and Sunny all agree that they used English as a way to translate what they did not know in Spanish.

Furthermore, knowledge in the language was beneficial when textbooks were in English, when they had to look for information vía Internet, and when they were used as resources in the classroom and in group work. Many fond memories they have are from the English courses they took in college. Michelle and Sofía enthusiastically share that those classes were the most enjoyable while Sunny remembered having English speaking professors who preferred him as a student due to his English proficiency.

Not only did language shape the narrators' life experiences and academic progress, but being a first generation college student was one of the most, if not the most, prevalent factor they had to face.

Social Class: “These people who are making plans belong to a different class; *they were los ricos del pueblo.*”

Upon asking each narrator what had motivated them to go to college, only one mentioned having had a personal interest. This suggests that for a low-income first generation college student, or at least for the narrators of this project, going to college was not something natural; actually it was seen as something almost impossible as illustrated below:

Lucky Boy: “Since I was one of the best athletes in High School in Puerto Rico, I thought that I would have to be offered something because I was on the top. I don't remember having thought about it before becoming an athlete because my parents were very poor. I knew they couldn't pay for my studies. I knew it cost money and that my parents couldn't, well, they didn't have the money to send any of us to study. There were grants but few people would explain the process or what I had to do.”

Sofia: “Nobody where I live goes to college; that's unheard of. You finish your fourth year in High School, you take Costura [Sewing] Industrial and you go work in the

factory. That's it. All of my aunts worked in the factory sewing and that's the way of life. How dare I think of anything else?"

Sunny: "When I was in Chicago I didn't even know what a university was. I just thought that was for rich people. That was it. I thought I was going to get as far as twelfth grade and go to some factory, you know, and climb the corporate ladder. I will be a supervisor, something like that."

Michelle's case is interestingly distinct from the other narrators of this research. She was the only person who stated having had the desire to go to college. However, her mother's economic hardship caused her to seek employment in order to help in the household. But as she says:

Later on I did go to college to learn grades in accounting in the States. Once I got that job in the store and I met that Cuban guy, he says to me "*take some courses 'cause that will help you out.*" And I did take some courses at night but it was so difficult for me traveling on the bus. [...] I was working at the time so I paid everything, the books and everything. It was a big deal for me because I wanted to better myself. I wanted a better job. I wanted to make more money.

Michelle did not earn a degree while taking some of the aforementioned courses in the United States. Many years later, she describes the second time she decided to study:

After I stopped working at an office on campus, I was told to "take something secretarial because there are more opportunities for secretarial work than in accounting." They suggested that to me so that is why I took the part-time Secretarial Sciences course in the Instituto de Banca during the night.

These two experiences show the longing desire Michelle had to go to college but also reflect how they were influenced by suggestions of others. While these educational preparations are valuable, it is her bachelors degree she received some years later that she thinks about when discussing college education. It is important to point out that from here on, when I refer to her college experiences, I am not referring to the accounting courses or to the track she approved at the Instituto de Banca, unless it is otherwise explained.

For Lucky Boy, Sofía, Sunny, and even for Michelle, the realization of being able to go to college and the interest to do so became tangible by other means as we see in their own words:

Lucky Boy: “They (Athletic representatives of a private university) spoke through the microphone and said “we are also going to give a scholarship to Lucky Boy because we think he is a good athlete and we want him in our institution.”

Michelle: I think that I went to college because I work here. I mean, I will be honest because first of all, I couldn't afford it. Having three kids and all that, I couldn't afford it. So working here, having the privilege of working and studying, that to me really was a big plus. I think if I wouldn't have been here at the university, I wouldn't. Maybe I would have taken a few little courses on the side, like I went to Instituto de Banca. But to go to a University like this one, prestigious, I don't think so. I couldn't afford it, especially now with the credits.

Sofía: “I had no intention of going to college when I was in eleventh grade. And then I met him (boyfriend). I met him in the summer of eleventh grade. And then he said “*no, you have to go to college, everybody goes to college.*”

Sunny: “When I came to Puerto Rico, college was like the thing to do. It was just this normal thing that after you go graduate from twelfth grade you go to university, that’s it. It wasn’t that you choose. You’re going and that’s it.”

Becoming aware that continuing studies after high school was an option in Puerto Rico was a life changing event for Lucky Boy, Michelle, Sofía, and Sunny. They were being motivated by family, partners, employee benefits, and scholarships. It is important to detail the path to college, and what this entailed for each one of these first generation college students.

The stones in Lucky Boy’s path had been cemented by a scholarship in athletics, making the trail much smoother:

The High School graduation was on a Friday. They told us athletes to go to the University on Monday to speak with the Director of the Athletics Department and that’s what I did. He took me to the Administration and they did everything. We did all of the paperwork there; personnel at the office helped me. We completed all of the documents, we didn’t have to pay. Everything was covered for athletes.

Lucky Boy’s recollections of his college experiences were always good. He described that moment of his life to be glorious. Because he was an athlete, he was looked up to on campus and was respected. This opened many doors for him, including travel in and out of Puerto Rico, assistance in college-related affairs, and self-confidence in his performance in the academic setting. But being an athlete had major responsibilities and consequences for those in need of a scholarship:

I entered through Biology but I transferred after about two years. In Biology there were a lot of labs. I had a scholarship for being an athlete. I had to train every morning and every evening. The labs were almost always at 5:00 p.m. If I didn’t go to my practices, I

couldn't receive the scholarship. I had to choose. I decided to transfer to the teaching of Physical Education. If I hadn't been an athlete, I may have been a doctor because I started in Biology to continue in Medicine. Those were my original plans. But then we got so caught up with athletics. Plus, that was why I received the scholarship. I had to practice a lot and started distancing from Biology and then changed to Physical Education which I think was a mistake. I resent that a little and if I were able to do it again, I would do it differently because it would have been better to follow the profession that I had thought of studying, which was Medicine. But, since I made so many friends and everyone looks at you as if you were up there and the others are below looking at you as if you were superior. I wasn't like that though, I didn't feel that way. I was very humble. But yes, I do not regret anything but that. If I hadn't been an athlete, I would have been a doctor.

The other downfall he attributes to his college studies was when a female professor blackmailed him for a grade. Since he did not partake in her proposal, the A he earned in his teaching practicum was reduced to a B. Besides this incident, he informs that he really enjoyed his college years.

Michelle's journey to higher education was diverse. As I have shared before, she took some accounting courses and went to a technical school before beginning her bachelors degree. She was unable to remember the process of applying for the initial courses she took but she did recall deciding to stop due to the schedule and transportation. It was very difficult for her at the time to be traveling on the bus at night, a situation that caused her mother to worry greatly. When Michelle was encouraged to start a technical track, she stated that the process flowed quite well:

Those institutes have something positive. They work well. They do not require so much documentation. If you don't take the papers one day, they allow you to take them after.

That's my opinion. There is a lot money-wise too. They help, during that time they helped me a lot.

After becoming an employee at the UPRM, Michelle recalls talking with someone about continuing studies:

I said "*I always wanted to study but I think I'm too old.*" I was about 50 or 51. They told me "*go for it no matter what.*" My boss at the time helped me a lot too. He supported me a lot and told me "Go for it. It is convenient for you because the first thing is that they give you a raise when you get that diploma." So I went to the Admissions Office and spoke with the Director. She told me to apply and explained everything I had to do. She told me I had to take the College Board. I remember I didn't get there on time and I had to pay extra money. Every time I had questions, I would go to her. I had to get my vaccines and just thought "oh my God. Here I go again, at this age, going to get vaccines." And when they would ask me why I wanted them, I said it was because I was going to start studying. People would look at me like if I'm some kind of wild woman! I had a lot of questions, a lot of problems. You know the process here, papers here and papers there. But my boss always helped. He told me I would learn a lot, that it was good and also because of the raise. I think I got around \$40.

Once she began, Michelle felt very happy about being a student again. In her opinion, this really meant going to college and she took advantage of the experiences. In her own words:

I remember I was so happy to buy lápices [pencils]. "*I'm going to buy my notebooks and want them to be jean books.*" That was so great. Looking for a book bag, I wanted a professional book bag. I really enjoyed that. I think it was great. I always remember that I took a scouting course. I never in my laugh had heard that word, scouting. I found that

strange. So I started looking, you know, *what is scouting?*” I remember going to the woods, to the forest in San Germán. The professor left me in charge. There was a student who went dressed as Rambo, the girls were so scared to take a shower, and the music they played was fantastic. There was one student who read the stars. I tell you, I enjoyed it. Another time we went to a park and the professor hid some things and we had to use a compass. I’d never done that. I really enjoyed it.

While she mainly remembers having good experiences, she mentions some of the downfalls of going to college:

Well, writing Spanish, I felt a bit bad because I did not know how. I imagine that other students, my classmates felt the same way I felt when they took their English courses.

This did not stop her from completing a degree. It had become a reality for Michelle and she highlights exactly what this meant to her:

I graduated from here (UPRM) in 2003 at the age of 59. I know because my son put it in the car “*at the age of 59, at last my mother graduated.*” Everybody would ask “*what is he talking about?*” I would respond “*damn, I graduated!*” I always wanted that. I always wanted to have a diploma from a university. I always wanted to study and be a professional. I wanted to learn. I wanted to do always a lot of stuff. I wanted to learn different languages ‘cause I loved the languages. But I never had the opportunities ‘cause I had to work. And then I had to take care of my kids and my mother. And so then, once my husband passed away, I said “*this is it. This is my opportunity.*” That was my dream. That was my dream and it really happened here. It was one of the happiest days of my life.

Lucky Boy and Michelle recounted stories of happiness and excitement when they thought about their college experience. They had gotten opportunities that allowed them to receive financial support for tuition and neither of them mentioned noticing differences in class while being in college. It was not something they encountered personally nor was it something that prevented them from achieving what they wanted. At the time Michelle studied, she was a full time employee on campus. In a sense, she did not have the obstacle of worrying about how to pay for college. She took her time in registering few courses during the semester but ultimately reached her goal. Location was convenient for her since she worked close to where she took classes and her children were grown by the time she needed time to study.

Lucky Boy was a full time student and athlete. As long as he met athletic requirements, he had no worries about funding tuition, fees, or housing. When transportation problems began to arise, he told the Director of the Athletics Department that he needed a car. Because he had a family by then, transportation was becoming more difficult. Lucky Boy received help in obtaining his first car

Sofia and Sunny's path to college was somewhat rockier. They were not working at the time they began college but they did qualify for financial aid. Yet in their case, consequences of being a first generation college student marked their experiences much deeper.

Sofia's first opportunity of studying after High School surfaced through what she calls a community college:

People from the community colleges go to school. They asked me to do an exercise in math, they were going to give me a test and I did really good. It was to study technology or computing I think it was. So I gave them my address and everything. I filled out the papers, they went to my house and they were filling out the papers. They went to my

house and everybody was looking at them very suspicious and my dad would cough and my mom said “*No, she is not going to do that.*” It was a no, no, no, no, no, no. Everything was no. And so they would look at me and I would look at them. I shrugged my shoulders and I said “*well, that’s that.*” And so I gave up. I gave up at that point and I said, “*Well okay, so I’m doomed.*”

Sofía began thinking about college again thanks to her boyfriend. He was the only person who would give her information and was the driving force for her to get to college. She mentions that if it hadn’t been for him, she would have returned to Chicago right after graduating from High School. When he spoke to her about it at the beginning, she recalls conversations like the following:

He said “*Sofía you know a lot of English. You’ll do good. You’ll do really good in college.*” And I said “*I don’t know*” and then I said “*but what am I going to study? I don’t want to become an English teacher for sure.*” (Referring to the negative experience she had with an English teacher in a public school in Puerto Rico). So I was sure, absolutely sure, I didn’t want to become her; the farther the better. Then I said, “*Where do I go?*” And he says, “*No, you go to El Colegio.*” I asked why and he responded “*You have to go to El Colegio. That’s where everybody goes who’s smart, and you’re really smart.*” I said “*really?*” Then I said “*Okay, I could do that.*”

Her boyfriend’s help at the time was crucial, especially when she had to confront the reality her family faced of not having economic capital:

We are nine kids. So the reason was there’s no money. I said “*there’s an application*” and my parents would respond “*there’s no money.*” He would say “*I’ll take care of it.*” So he paid for my application. And he paid for the photographs, then he would pay for

the stamp. He would help me out. He would drive me back and forth and make sure it was in the mail. He did that part.

In addition, he played an important role in giving her an application when the school didn't:

He ran to the office and he says "*Here, I got these papers for you. Fill them out.*"

Because again, they (the administrators at school) knew who their population was and they would target that population. So they would go to the AP classes and they would go to certain groups or they'd have the people they wanted. I have no recollection, no idea, and no memory of having received orientation from the school. I only remember my boyfriend giving me the papers and saying "*Here, I'm going to sit with you. Let's do this together.*" Then I filled it out and he took it away. He said he'd make sure it went to the mail."

The excitement of having been admitted to the UPRM was quickly overshadowed with the lack of support from her family, which I will discuss in a separate section, and by the economic hardship they confronted:

I started crying because I told my parents and they said I wasn't going anywhere. So I cried, lots of crying. "*No, you're not going to college.*" And then I said okay. And then he said "*don't tell them anymore and just keep planning.*" So then what I did was, on the side, I kept saving money and doing things and getting ready. I would clean my aunt's house. I would do babysitting and they would give me one or two dollars and so I would save everything. Then I think that summer I got called again for a second summer job. And so then I used it completely because they said "*okay if you're going to do college, you have to pay your own expenses. We're not going to give you anything at all.*" That

was a really big no. And then I said okay. So then that summer when I got the job, the first thing I wanted was a wrist watch. It was a Timex, it was a blue belt. Then I got clothes and shoes and it felt good. It felt really good to buy my own things.”

Sofía stayed in an aunt’s house relatively close to campus and walked back and forth every day. Although her parents lived on the west side, where the UPRM is located, they were unable and/or unwilling to drive her back and forth on a daily basis. In general, Sofía describes the beginning of college as follows:

I was really shy when I got to college. I was so afraid of losing myself. When I got here, I said “*noooo, it’s not like that* (referring to the negative aspects her family had described).” I said “*you can be whoever you want. If you want to be one, you be one; if you don’t, you don’t* (a negative adjective used by her family to refer to girls who went to college).” So then I started speaking my mind. I got into trouble. I had a voice. I got a voice in college. It was then “*no, I’m in charge of me.*” I’m in charge of me.

She decided to major in Business because she thought it would have the most offerings in English courses. To her dismay, the amount of courses in English was not what she had envisioned and she always longed for the moments in which she would finally have an English class. Almost immediately she realized that the major she had selected was not what she wanted to do. She became unhappy and thought about changing to mathematics. Given her skills in the subject and her high scores on the College Board, she felt assured with this decision. Unfortunately, the Department did not have enough spaces for transfer students so she decided to continue with her original plans.

As time passed, things became more difficult for Sofía. The fact that her family had never experienced going to college did not help. When she would return to the house on weekends, she

was required to help out with chores and with her younger siblings. The importance of completing assignments and having good study habits was not a reality for her parents. They were confronting issues of their own, expecting another child, which led Sofia's father to find an escape in alcohol. But they always had an effect on Sofia when she was away during the week:

My dad and my mom put a lot of pressure on my aunt. Then she says "*I can't take it anymore. It's a lot; you're going to have to do something.*" I said "*okay, I'm not going to drop college. I'm going to find a place.*" So then I found a place, a dorm near the hospital. It was a place for about 8 students and I was the only one there. It was really, really lonely and it was with an old lady. She would eat my food. I would come home and I couldn't find my stuff. And then I would tell him (boyfriend) "*you know she ate my food again.*" And then he says "*well, we're going to have to do something.*"

Doing something about it implied going against Sofia's parents' rules. One of the things she had to confront, as many first generation college students do, was meeting the customs and rules at home while trying to adapt to a new lifestyle. Since she was from a low-income household, she did not have a car. This was not a major setback during the week, except for the regular rainy days in which she preferred to be soaked in class instead of being absent. However, it was a problem during the weekends as she narrates:

My dad was arguing and complaining about having to spend all this gas and time to pick me up. One day he (father) didn't come and pick me up and I cried all weekend. And then another weekend I told my boyfriend to take me. It turns out that when he came, my father came as well. My dad said never ever again would he travel and take me to the university, to not count on him. He couldn't do it anymore. And I said okay so my boyfriend would drive me and all the time I would cry all the way home. And then I

started saying “*well, I’m going to travel every other weekend.*” So that was a problem. So if I wasn’t in school, what was I doing? So then it was even worse. Then my boyfriend said “*you know what? I think it’s time. I think it’s time. Let’s get married and stop all this bullshit.*”

Sofía got married and continued in college, until it became too hard for her, resulting in dropping out in her third year. Her husband made her promise she would return to finish her degree someday, which she did.

Sofía explains some of the things that happened in college causing her to be unable to cope with her new reality:

Before dropping out, I would focus a lot on how deficient I was and that I didn’t have what other students had. I was competing with other students in terms of everything. I didn’t have a car. I had to use the *beca* (grant) for eating, so I had to balance a budget. I had never dealt with balancing a budget. I never got an allowance. There was not enough for the family, even more for an allowance. So balancing a budget was a bit hard and then I was always comparing myself to others. Plus, the amount of reading that I was doing in El Colegio was very different from High School. I didn’t have anybody at home to tell me you know, “*go ahead and study, this is your private time for studying.*”

While Sofía was out of college and working full time (she gained several experiences because of her knowledge in English), she noticed having talent in other areas, causing her to decide to get a degree from a technical school:

I told my husband I was out of school, that I needed money, that we needed money. I asked him “*so what if I go back to school?*” He said it was okay and then I said “*well, I want to go to a technical school.*” He said “*whatever makes you happy, but you have to*

go back to college you know.” I said “well let’s look at it this way. If I go to el Colegio they’ll give me beca (grant). But I can’t use it to get a technical degree. But if I get my technical degree, technically, I can go to el Colegio and they’ll give me the beca (grant) again.” So there was a glitch in the system. Now there isn’t. So then I went to a school and I got my degree. As soon as I did that I said *“here it is, I got it.”* So then I cracked the code of how to study. Because everything I read I loved a lot. Then I said *“oh this is how you summarize. This is how you do this, and this is how you do that.”*

Sofía’s experience in a technical school made her feel she was doing something she really loved. She states having developed her reading and study skills thanks to this degree. Upon finishing, she was employed in the technical school as a teacher but had also started taking Education courses in *el Colegio*. Due to the fact that she was spending more than what she was earning, and that she really enjoyed the coursework in Education, Sofía told her husband she really wanted to go back to school full time because she could now do it. He supported her decision. Her technical degree allowed her to earn money during the weekends while she studied during the week. She explains how she didn’t feel like an outsider anymore, upon returning to *el Colegio* to finish her degree:

It had changed a lot. I had a car; I could move around freely. On the weekend I could work doing what I really loved. Emotionally it helped me out a lot too. I had money. Let me put it in another way. My brain was free to concentrate on what it had to concentrate, and not worrying about eating or where I would get my next check from.

Sofía decided to finish what she had started; not only in college, but with her major as well. Although she was not happy, she decided to continue. English professors talked to her about her abilities in English and tried to motivate her to transfer to the English Department.

Sofía did not want her transcripts showing so many changes since she had already dropped several business courses to pursue courses in Education. Sofía completed her bachelors degree in Business.

As I previously mentioned, Sunny's experience in college involved taking different paths in order to reach his goal. Although when he was young he did not have a sense of what college was, he did have help in getting there:

The social worker from the school, she was the one who took me all the way architecture school. I went to the open house with my College Board. I already knew I could not go into the University of Puerto Rico. (Scores) In Spanish were so low that even though I did improve a lot in High School with my Spanish; it wasn't good enough for University. My social worker said "*There is a private school. You can try it, maybe you can go into engineering or something like that if you like math.*" So I did go and I took my college scores. I didn't know that that year there was going to be an architecture program opening.

My dad took me and my sister to the open house because we both didn't qualify to go into the University of Puerto Rico. We went through the tour and I pass by one of the doors and it said: "*Charla sobre nuevo programa de arquitectura [Talk about the new architecture program.*" I met Jorge Rigau, which is a very reknown architect here in Puerto Rico. He gave us the way we would have to go into architecture school in the University of Puerto Rico. Then he explained to us the way that we would be able to do. I saw that his way was much more easier to go to architecture school. After the talk, they handed out the applications for the architecture school. I remember it was just one sheet

and they had a table downstairs. I said I *would like to enroll*. I told my father. He said “*Well you wanna go? You’re here, let’s just do it.*” And I did it.

They did everything for me. I didn’t have to do anything. They filled out my beca [grant]. They filled out my application forms. All I had to do was write the check. That was it. That was it. And they said “ok, you’re in. First day of class will be such and such day.” That’s how it went. When I came to the University of Puerto Rico, oh my God, I had to do everything.

While in this private institution, Sunny describes many issues he confronted that made him feel uncomfortable:

The experience was intimidating; there was a lot of intimidation. In the private school I was intimidated with the social class of my peers. There were a lot of rich people there. I would come in my 97 Van and wait for parking. The people around me had new cars. When I would do my projects, I would use very simple materials and then I would see that some of my classmates had done this design and had paid someone else to do their design. I thought it was cheating, but hey they had the money to do it. The teachers had no problems with that. I thought “well my design was good but I’m not going to spend that much money on that type of a model.” Those people who contracted someone else to do their stuff, well, that was the work that they would display. So in that sense, it was very weird, very weird. There was a difference. It was kind of like, *como si yo estuviera cola’o*. Like if I was lucky to be there.

Having to face the cost of a college education was not easy for Sunny. From the start, he knew studying in this private institution would be expensive:

I had to pay one thousand dollars more than what the beca [grant] had given me. That was every three months. It was a trimester program. So I'd have to come up with a thousand dollars every three months. It was expensive. And the materials for architecture were about a hundred dollars a week; drawing and art supplies is very expensive. So I would spend an average of a hundred dollars a week on materials. It was a lot and so the business was falling down (referring to his father's business in his native town). I wasn't of no help anymore for my father. He had to hire more people to work for him and that's of course less, less money in his pocket. So that's how it went. It just went down. And by 2001 it was already closed.

When Sunny's father began experiencing hardship, this had a direct effect on him. After several years, he learned that it had actually been his mother who had paid for his college education. She showed him saving bonds that she had especially for when he needed them. This situation caused Sunny to make important decisions regarding his education:

I was very worn out, very worn out. Even though I was a part time student, the work was huge. It was a lot of work. It was a lot of money. My father would fight a lot about this because he was paying so much. He wanted me to go on the weekends and mow the lawn. I'm like "*Dad, I don't have time. I don't think I can even go on the weekend.*" And then he wouldn't give me the money. That's how it went. I saw I didn't have any money to continue my study and I had this stress that my father didn't want to help me at all. So I decided to go to the University of Puerto Rico. I had a friend that was the Director of Cultural Activities from my church and he helped me get in the University of Puerto Rico in Arecibo as a transfer student. And he told me it was okay as a transfer student to go in. I didn't need College Board. So that's how I got in to the University of Puerto Rico.

Sunny changed majors from time to time because of this situation. From being an architecture major in a private institution, he went to communications in a public university and back to architecture. Many times feelings of guilt became present:

I have a lot of energy that goes into filling other people's expectations of myself. I have had few experiences where I was not able to deliver what was expected from me and I feel regret for letting someone down. So when I was not able to finish architecture, after my mother paying thousands of dollars, every three months, two thousand dollars more than what the beca [grant] would cover, I felt that I was wasting their money and their time. And in a way I thought that maybe I deserved this thing of punishing again, deserved not to go back to architecture again.

During this period, he encountered probations and suspensions in part because of grades and also because he had been advised to register part-time. Once he lost financial aid, the idea of college completion seemed to fade away. He left the academic setting for half a year and worked in a factory because of his English proficiency. Nonetheless, he became interested again in the humanities and the arts until he finally decided to major in Spanish at the UPRM. He almost changed again but his partner was a very influential person during the later years of Sunny's college experience:

I did almost want to change again. But I think my partner was the one who really pushed me into finishing that degree. I think that if it wasn't for him, I would not have finished or I would have gone into something else. I think I would have finished in Art. I think I would have just done the change and gone to art, yes.

Throughout the years that it took him to finish his bachelors degree, Sunny dealt with internal and external struggles. He was working with self-expectations and negotiating the

passion and talent he had in a hobby, for studies in an area that his partner considered being better. Although Sunny was able to finish his degree in Spanish, it seems he has yet to close a wound:

In a way I punish myself. I feel that even though I did overcome something, I didn't do it as expected. Like for my bachelors degree, I didn't go to my graduation. I know that it was something in my head that I was not going to go to my bachelors degree graduation. I felt like I didn't deserve to go to that. I had decided not going to my graduation years before graduating.

The final factor I found within the data to be influential in the lives of these first generation college student return migrants was the role of their family and friends. The story was not the same for any of the narrators and I explain how support came to unwind in each life experience:

Role of family and friends: “They were happy because I was going to college.”

I have shown the negotiations that first generation college students have to make when they begin college studies. What was home once feels different when you're divided between two distant settings. The extent to which support was received by family and friends played a pivotal role in the lives of the narrators of this research work.

Lucky Boy's experience with his family members was always positive. When his parents found out that he would receive a scholarship, they became very excited. Although he did not see them frequently because he lived away from home and close to the campus, he always felt they treated him differently – in a good way:

They (parents) have always trusted me more than anyone else in my family, and my grandmother too; all of them, always. Both of my grandmothers because they always

loved me a lot and always gave me much attention. When I would visit, they would always give me everything they had.

In Michelle's case, she almost always received positive feedback from family and friends when deciding to go to college. When she took accounting courses, she thinks her mother must have felt proud, but was too worried about how late Michelle would return home while driving on the bus. During her experience in the Instituto de Banca, she always had some type of support as well. When desiring to pursue studies at the UPRM, she told her husband and his response was:

Don't be stupid. You have a job, you have everything. You are already permanent. Why the heck are you going to study? Forget about it. Become frustrated with new things, buy books, waste money, for what?

This did not bring Michelle down. All the contrary, she decided to start because her three sons supported her decision. While other family members and friends did not become an obstacle, they would joke and bother her when she would say she had homework or exams to study for. Many friends and colleagues were influential in Michelle's life, especially her supervisor. They had developed a good relationship and he supported and motivated her to get a bachelors degree.

The story was different for Sofía. The only support and motivation she received when pursuing undergraduate and graduate studies was from her boyfriend, who she later married. Her husband was one of the most, if not the most influential person in her life, especially when it was related to studies and employment. Throughout the entire experience, and almost until she became independent, her parents firmly expressed being in disagreement with her decision to go

to college. The majority of her family members made her feel bad with comments they said about her:

The thing that shocked me the most was the way the family spoke about me. It was very ill. And I said "*I'm not like that.*" They weren't shy at all to say that "*las locas son de la Universidad.*" So every time I would walk to a place I would hear all of these comments and remarks. They didn't make me happy. I worked with that. I tried to deal with that for about a year."

Sofía's parents never really accepted or understood her decisions to continue graduate studies either. When asked why she thought her parents didn't accept this, Sofia attributed it to fear. She thought they might have been afraid of losing her since she helped out so much within the household.

For Sunny, the role of family and friends was mixed. At the beginning, his family was there to support him emotionally and financially. When tough times arose economically, his dad's support diminished. Sunny says that when he was studying architecture, his parents and other family members considered him to be someone important. This perception changed when he transferred to Spanish. He describes the support he received from his parents during the later years of his bachelors degree, and how that affected him:

One thing that could be a blessing and a curse at the same time was that at the end it was like: "*You can do anything, even though we'd like the fact that you were an architecture student but you know.*" Having that choice of anything was a problem for me. It was a problem for me because I know this was an issue. After all, this was my yes and my no, indecisive. If you give a person many options, especially an indecisive person, he's not

going to know what to do. So they supporting me in anything that I chose to do was not a very guiding advice.

Sunny's partner and a good friend from church helped him greatly throughout his journey through college.

Summarizing Socio-Cultural Factors

We have learned how migration, language, social class, and the role of family and friends shaped the lives and higher education experiences of the narrators of this study. These were the most influential factors that continuously arose within the data. Indirectly, answers to the research questions have flourished within the data provided above, accounting to preliminary findings.

However, I return to the inquiries that guided this project and reencounter with the theory that framed this study in order to discuss the answers to the research questions.

Understanding Findings of Research Inquiries

Setting out to learn – through conducting research and analyzing the data – (1) how FGCS return migrants represent, in the narrations of their life histories, English, English competence and their own linguistic practices and experiences in Puerto Rico, I found that the narrators had enough cultural capital needed in Puerto Rico regarding English proficiency, competence and linguistic practices. Their representations of English at the time of this study were positive, attributing the same importance to the language as seen in other works discussed in this thesis. The English competence Lucky Boy has now is not the same as that of Michelle, Sofía, and Sunny. We must remember though that he became in touch with the language at a much older age than the rest of the narrators Lucky Boy says “One's English is here (pointing to his head). It is in our subconscious.” This ties together with Bourdieu's notion of embodied

capital that I explained in the second chapter of this document. All of the narrators' discourse revolved around English being important, being a resource in college and in job opportunities. However, I found though that the majority of them used Spanish more frequently, even if English had been an instrument of employment.

When questioning (2) the extent to which English proficiency plays a role in FGCS return migrants' decision to pursue a college degree, the data suggests that except for Sofía, English proficiency was not crucial when these first generation college student return migrants decided to pursue a college degree. At the moment in which Lucky Boy, Michelle, and Sunny started college, they did so for other reasons, but not because they thought English would be key in making the process easier. Even in Sofía's life, it was not English proficiency directly that influenced her decision. It was what her boyfriend told her about her good English and how useful it would be in college that motivated her to apply. When analyzing this, I find that the narrators did not have the adequate types of capital to desire pursuing college studies.

Another research question aimed at answering (3) the extent in which English proficiency might influence performance in college for FGCS return migrants. While they adventured in the journey through college, the narrators, except for Lucky Boy, did use English as a resource and this positively influenced their performance in college. However, the majority of the courses were in Spanish, resulting in the lack of need for English proficiency. This was not the case for Sunny since he would use English to do his assignments, and then he would translate them to Spanish and hand them in as final versions. In Lucky Boy's case, his English proficiency in college was low, but he still managed to do well in his Biology courses where textbooks were in English. I found that while it was positive for the narrators to consider themselves bilingual, in practice – in the day to day experiences – performance in Spanish was vital. Furthermore, the

English that the narrators needed to know for college, was not the ordinary English they had learned outside of college. Language use was subjected to what all of the narrators described as the ‘right’ English and/or Spanish: standard or the language of wider communication. It seemed to be a process of learning and re-learning both languages. In this case, we can see that the narrators needed the right type of cultural capital in order to do better within their studies at the UPRM.

Finally, interrelated questions sought to answer two final concerns: (4) To what extent might English proficiency influence upward mobility for FGCS return migrants, and (5) How do FGCS return migrants characterize their college experiences and the value of a college education for themselves and for their family? After analyzing the data, I found that the influence English proficiency had on upward mobility and success for the first generation college student return migrants in this project varied. Lucky Boy had been able to participate in athletic competitions around the world, receive a scholarship and have academic success in college. This was all done with the limited English he considered knowing at the time. He was able to activate other types of capital that seemed more important in meeting his goals. He was an overachiever throughout his life and as he says, in the Army it was not different:

I think English is important but it is not the key. I didn’t know English when I left to the States and I was successful. I got promoted faster than any of the Americans that were next to me and who had entered with me. They obviously knew more English than I did. Maybe I’m the exception. But there are people who know English and never do anything, they are failures in life. Well, like everything, in Spanish as well, any language. There are people who are always failures. A failure is a person who, having all of the necessary

resources in their hands, does not use them to move up, to become a professional, to have a nice house, to have a good profession, to improve their quality of life.

Michelle always wanted to do better than the circumstances she had been surrounded with once she left Puerto Rico to go to the United States. She went from probably being one of the less needy families on her street, to having only distant memories of receiving the best things. Michelle knew she wanted more for her life and she worked hard to achieve everything she desired. While English did help her move in the ladder of upward mobility, my finding is that she would have worked her way around becoming successful, regardless of language use. That is, she had other types of capital that she successfully activated. Her opinion about English being key for upward mobility and success is as follows:

English is a plus. The more languages you know, the more plusses you have. So it is key. But also you have to be a little bit intelligent. You have to use a lot of common sense. People here sometimes they don't use common sense. And you also have to be willing to work for it, really work for it. There are some people that get it sent to them; they're so lucky or whatever you want to call it. But the people that are not lucky, they really have to work for it.

Sofia's English proficiency did influence upward mobility due to the job opportunities she became exposed to continuously. Having this to her favor, she began making a life of her own where she did not go through the trials and tribulations she had confronted in her youth. But she clarifies why English is not the only thing that is important:

It might sound like a contradiction. For example, sometimes I see people who get a job because they know English but they're not qualified for the job. And they do a really mediocre job and they're really bad at it.

When asked how she would define the notion of success, Sofía quickly gave the following description:

Success is being able to set a goal, being able to reach your goal, and you moving towards it but the people around you move with you. For me success is not tripping people over and growing by yourself and getting to the top really fast, and doing whatever you have to do, whatever it takes to get there because eventually that's going to crumble. I think that I discovered this early on.

I found that Sunny's relationship with English proficiency in Puerto Rico has not yet influenced his upward mobility, or that it is still in the process. He struggled so much with Spanish throughout his college years, which represented a long time in his personal life, that English seemed to be second place for him. As of now he has not developed all of the forms of capital that Bourdieu refers to. But when asked about English as key for upward mobility and success, he shares:

Right now I feel successful, or at least on my way to becoming successful, because I'm where I want to be, with who I want to be, and I'm studying what I want to be. I still believe that I'm the only one who does this craziness of taking so long to finish my bachelors degree. I just thought it was part of my whole history of moving, and changing, and unstableness of it. And so, these last few years, I have been working on myself like it's my personal project, to become more stable in my relationship, sticking to things that I am passionate about. I always define success as *el rico no es el que más tiene, sino el que menos necesita* [the rich person is not the one who has the most, but who needs the least].

While it is important to understand the extent to which English proficiency influenced upward mobility, I found that it is only possible to discuss upward mobility in the lives of the narrators, by linking it to the value they give to a college education. When going to college became a reality for the first generation college student return migrants, it represented something that was not of much value to them at the time. I illustrate the perceptions they had when this research was conducted:

Lucky Boy: “It is much more important now-a-days to have a college degree, in comparison to some years ago. And more than a bachelors degree, but to have a masters or a doctorate or something like that because there is too much competition now.

Whoever does not have a college degree, more than a bachelors, has to move and get a masters degree or something like that. I know many people who have a bachelors degree and they are working in Burger King or Kmart. Having gone to college has influenced my life greatly because it has made me a better person and professional.”

Michelle: “It was important for me because it was a dream come true. It made me a better, smarter, and more intelligent person. It made me more proud. It made my kids proud. And now-a-days, like I say “*pa carnicero quieren un college degree [they want a butcher to have a college degree]*.” High School is no longer an option. You have to have a little bit more.

Sofía: “So a college degree, no, the paper means nothing. It’s what’s behind it. If they get the critical thinking and the creativity and the know-how, then with that they’ll be able to do something. And I tell them (students) “*don’t expect to leave college and have somebody waiting outside to hire you. You have to come up with it yourself.*”

Sunny: “For Puerto Rican context right now I think a college degree is not that important in Puerto Rico. But I think if that person is planning on going away from Puerto Rico, I think it is important. Because as an immigrant, I think to have something to back you up. But over here, everything’s political and it doesn’t matter what degree you have. *Si tú no eres familia del fulano que manda [If you are not related to the mister who is in charge]*, you’re not gonna get the job. A lot of politics, a lot of networking, and it’s a reality, a sad reality. And then in Puerto Rico you have a bachelors degree but it’s just this pretty nice little paper hanging in your office. If you do want to compete with something here in the market in Puerto Rico, you’re going to have to look for a masters or a doctors degree.

In my case, I think it was something maybe personal for me, something good for me personally. But in that for helping me get a job out there, I don’t think so. I think my next diploma will be my masters degree so maybe that’s what will actually land me a job somewhere. I think it’s not really the end result, it’s just the process. I think that (college education for bachelors degree) was more about growing up and getting to become somebody and thinking as a rationale person. I think the journey of it was the best part, not the end result.

Through the Lens of Bourdieu

The perceptions of upward mobility and success that the narrators express relate again to Bourdieu’s forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), the framework that guided this project. Not only does success signify having enough economic capital, but it interplays with social and cultural capital. In this sense, we see concepts as success similar to the totality of capitals, that is, to symbolic capital.

When the narrators were in college, they did not have the right type of symbolic capital that was necessary to better maximize their opportunities. I provide specific examples that support my claim

Cultural Capital

To briefly mention what I thoroughly explained before, Bourdieu (1986) proposed that cultural capital is a combination of having embodied, objectified, and institutionalized capital. That is, an individual that has enough skills, talents, material objects, and legitimate recognitions may have the adequate type of capital in their day to day exchanges in life. In Figure 9, I provide a comparison of the cultural capital the narrator’s had upon entering college and at the time of this study:

CULTURAL CAPITAL		
Narrator	Upon entering college	At the time of this study
Lucky Boy	Athletic Ability, recognitions for performance	Bilingual, Athletic Ability, recognitions in Galería de los Inmortales
Michelle	Bilingual, certification from technical school, Accounting courses	Bilingual, bachelors degree
Sofía	Bilingual	Bilingual, certification from a technical school, PhD, etc.
Sunny	Bilingual	Bilingual, 2 certifications from technical schools, bachelors degree

Figure 9: Narrator’s cultural capital.

As shown above, the FGCS return migrants that participated in this study did expand to some extent their cultural capital after beginning college. However, the path in college was very hard since they did not have the right type of capital that was much more than solely knowing English.

Economic Capital

Bourdieu (1986) defines economic capital as the tangible products that can be converted into money. Throughout this work, we have witnessed the struggles the narrators had to go

through due to lack of economic capital at the time they started college. Figure 10 shows how their economic capital has progressed during the years:

ECONOMIC CAPITAL		
Narrator	Upon entering college	At the time of this study
Lucky Boy	Family was poor. He received a fellowship in order to go to college	Land properties, vehicles, house, and savings
Michelle	She was employed at the time she started her bachelors degree	House, vehicle, and some savings
Sofía	Family was poor. It was difficult to make ends meet financially	Land properties, vehicles, houses, and savings
Sunny	Family had a business but closed soon after he started studying. Economic hardship was present throughout his studies	Vehicle, but does not have properties

Figure 10: Narrator's economic capital.

Social Capital

Social capital as described by Bourdieu (1986) is the capital individuals have to certain social clubs, networking gatherings, and access to people and things that can improve a persons status. Lucky Boy, Michelle, Sofía, and Sunny have had different social capitals at distinct moments in their lives.

SOCIAL CAPITAL		
Narrator	Upon entering college	At the time of this study
Lucky Boy	Olympic Committee, Group of student athletes	Army, groups and/or people that may know English, etc.
Michelle	Several offices and people on UPRM campus, technical school, and groups and/or people that may have known English	Several offices and people on UPRM campus, technical school, and groups and/or people that may know English, etc.
Sofía	Groups and/or people that may have known English	Several offices and people on UPRM campus, technical school, groups and/or people that may know English, US University campus, etc.
Sunny	Groups and/or people that may have known English, people who may have been acquainted with high social status his partner was in	UPRM, groups and/or people that may have known English, people who may have been acquainted with high social status his partner was in, etc.

Figure 11: Narrator's social capital.

At the time of this research, the narrator's symbolic capital had improved greatly, although their cultural capital is always dependent on the circumstances in which they are in.

The value that Lucky Boy, Michelle, Sofía, and Sunny give to a college degree coincides with Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. I suggest that beyond English representing an instrument of upward mobility, it was being the first to obtain a college degree that actually provided for escalating the ladder. English helped, but it was what the narrators did with their different forms of capital in university settings that allowed them to level up and out of the circumstances that were originally impeding them from gaining more adequate capital.

Chapter VI: Closing the loop in storytelling and life history research: A conclusion

Meanings have been given to the life experiences of four return migrants who were the first to obtain a college degree in their immediate families. I have intended to recreate their life histories in such a way that their voices become heard not only from up above and down below, but from all around. Yes, because the space that divides those who are powerless – in the lower levels – and powerful – on the top – needs to be narrowed as Brusi suggests (2009).

Summary of Findings

I feel as though there are no limits to the findings of the data obtained for this research project. Each time I visited and revisited the transcripts, I would have additional questions. Yet, I realize that the main finding that became present from the very first to the last interview I conducted was that social class highly affects the process of higher education (before, during, and after). This study documents the struggles first generation college students have to confront and overcome in order to obtain a college degree. It also exemplifies the value of a college education for this population which is underrepresented in the literature in the context of Puerto Rico.

In addition, I found that English was not solely the key for success in the lives of these narrators. For a low-income first generation college student, it takes much more than only knowing one language to achieve academic and professional success on the island. The cultural capital of English was outweighed by that of Spanish. Proficiency in both languages eases the path to and in college.

This work paints a new picture about return migrants and their attributed social status due to English proficiency. As we saw through the life histories of the narrators, it was not only necessary to know English, but it was also important to master Spanish; and using both of them

in ways in which it was academically appropriate. In addition, we learned about the consequences return migrants have to face when they change places and what being Puerto Rican meant for them. Moreover the implications of this study provide a better understanding of the return migration experience in linguistic, cultural and social terms as it interrogated the correlation between English fluency, educational/professional opportunities and social status; the extent to which this was true for return migrants; and if so, under what conditions.

Finally, the findings of this research project shed light on the importance of conducting qualitative research. More than generalizing, we need to focus on the true meanings that individuals are giving to personal experiences that are affecting them in public matters.

Educational Implications

This project has educational implications that can benefit policy and research. The first educational implication is the need to establish concrete policy in writing for return migrants in K-12 public and private schools on the island. This population has to confront many changes, and the school setting should be an ideal place to smooth the adaptation process. In addition, it is fundamental that records begin to be kept in order to identify how these populations are represented in different contexts on the island.

Another implication this study offers is a look into how higher education and language policy should be attended to. The lack of a policy in higher institutions had direct consequences on students and their performance in college.

Last but not least, an educational implication that is crucial is the attention that should be given to social class regarding discourse around language and education in Puerto Rico. This study had revealed that not all English speakers are actually from a higher social status, and how

this has affected students who do not have the correct type of capital to succeed in college. We must begin to understand that there are other factors that affect learning outcomes.

Finally, this study is an exercise in interdisciplinary English studies that contributes to enriching debates that can have an impact on English education, English learning and English scholarship from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Suggestions for Future Research

The depth of this research project did not allow me to focus on everything I hoped for at the beginning of this endeavor. A study I think would be valuable in the context of Puerto Rico is the role technical schools play for low income student. Three of the four narrators decided to go to a technical school or follow an associates degree. When a bachelors degree does not represent an immediate form of receiving income, poorer students with less access to colleges, public ones in this case, choose to take courses in technical schools. Furthermore, the role of the Army should also be looked into more carefully since it also provides a way to achieve economic capital in a readily manner.

Another project that I suggest relates to studying migrants who were born in the United States and who then moved. As a result of my work, I noticed that the two who were born in the US and who had moved to Puerto Rico at the age of 13 went through more difficulties in college than the narrators born on the island.

Limitations of the Study

I believe that my biggest setback when doing this work was when I had to decide what to include and exclude from the life histories of the narrators. While I tried to include as much I

could, in different ways, I felt that the depth of the data did not allow me to share all the topics we discussed together.

The other limitation of the study was operationalizing return migrants and first generation college students. I received many notifications of people who were interested in being part of my study, in having their stories told. When I contacted them, they did not meet both of the criteria I was seeking.

Concluding Remarks

This is but another story in the lives of Lucky Boy, Michelle, Sofia, and Sunny, and in my own. Let this not be the last to read, but the spark of initial interest to continue telling, recording, and sharing the life histories of those who are underrepresented in higher education.

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Appendix A

Description of the Research Project

Lisa Ortiz-Guzmán, MAEE Candidate
Master of Arts in English Education
Department of English
College of Arts & Sciences
University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez

Research Title: ***El inglés es la clave: Life Histories of First-Generation-College-Student Return Migrants and Their Perceptions of English as Key to College and Professional Success***

Description of the Research Project

I am a current graduate student of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM) and a candidate for the Master of Arts in English Education. As part of the degree requirements, I will be conducting a research project leading to the submission of a thesis. The purpose of my study is to document the meanings that first generation college student return migrants give to their experiences in college and, if applicable, to the personal and work experiences they have had after college in Puerto Rico.

A description of the proposed research project is detailed below so that you have the necessary information when deciding to become part of the study. Your participation in this research project is not obligatory, and refusing to participate or deciding not to participate after having agreed will in no way, shape or form affect your possible relationship with this department, the researcher and/or the university.

The data of this research will primarily be gathered by individual interviews focusing on your experience as a first generation college student and as a return migrant. The interviews will

be scheduled in accordance to your availability and the number of interviews may vary. The interviews will be tape-recorded (and, if you agree, possibly video-recorded) with the sole purpose of enriching the data that will be used for the study. The audio and videos that will be generated will only be used by the researcher during the data analysis process and will not be accessible to third parties. One focus group interview in which all participants will participate, will be conducted after the individual interviews have been transcribed. The purpose of the focus groups is to help clarify doubts that may arise within the data collection and analysis.

You can feel in complete freedom to clarify any question you may have before, during, and/or after the completion of this research project. I will be willing to share the results of my data analysis with all of the participants who constitute my study. Your name will not be associated with this research, since it will be substituted by a pseudonym of your choice. There are no complications or high risks in this study. However, your contribution will be significant for the literature regarding first generation college students, return migrants and college education in Puerto Rico.

In addition to my thesis, this study may be published and/or presented in professional conferences. I reassure you that under all circumstances, the confidentiality of every participant will be protected.

Appendix B

Descripción del Proyecto de Investigación

Lisa Ortiz-Guzmán, Candidata a Maestría
Maestría en Artes en Educación en Inglés
Departamento de Inglés
Facultad de Artes y Ciencias
Universidad de Puerto Rico en Mayagüez

Título de la Investigación: ***El inglés es la clave: Life Histories of First-Generation-College-Student Return Migrants and Their Perceptions of English as Key to College and Professional Success***

Descripción del Proyecto de Investigación

Actualmente soy estudiante graduada de la Universidad de Puerto Rico en Mayagüez (UPRM) y candidata al grado de Maestría en Educación en Inglés. Como parte de los requisitos del grado, estaré llevando a cabo un proyecto de investigación que formará la base para la entrega de una tesis. El propósito de mi estudio es exponer los significados que estudiantes universitarios de primera generación, que también son migrantes que regresaron a Puerto Rico, le dan a las experiencias en Puerto Rico.

A continuación se detalla una descripción del estudio que realizaré con el propósito de proveerle la información necesaria para que usted pueda decidir si desea o no participar del mismo. Su participación en este estudio no es obligatoria y el abstenerse de participar o cesar su participación una vez iniciada la investigación, de ninguna forma afectará su relación con este departamento, su profesor(a), la investigadora y/o la universidad.

La data de esta investigación será recopilada en su mayoría mediante entrevistas individuales enfocadas a su experiencia como estudiante universitario de primera generación y como migrante que retorna en Puerto Rico. Las entrevistas serán programadas de acuerdo a su

disponibilidad y la cantidad de las mismas pueden variar. Las sesiones de entrevista serán grabadas con una grabadora de audio (y posiblemente con una cámara de video) con el único propósito de enriquecer la data que analizaré. Dichos audios y videos sólo se utilizarán por la investigadora durante el proceso de análisis de data y no será accesible a terceras partes. Grupos focales, entrevistas que incluirán a todos los participantes, se llevarán a cabo luego de realizadas y transcritas las entrevistas individuales. Los mismos servirán para aclarar dudas que puedan surgir durante el análisis de data.

Puede sentirse en la libertad de clarificar cualquier duda que le surja antes, durante y después de la realización de este estudio. Estaré dispuesta a compartir los resultados de mi análisis de data con todos los participantes del estudio. Su nombre no será asociado con este estudio ya que el mismo se sustituirá por un seudónimo. No existen complicaciones ni ningún riesgo significativo en este estudio. Sin embargo, su contribución al mismo podría ser significativa para literatura concerniente a estudiantes universitarios de primera generación, migrantes que retornan y la educación del inglés en la universidad y en Puerto Rico.

En adición a mi tesis, este estudio podría ser publicado y/o presentado en conferencias profesionales. Reitero que en todas circunstancias la confidencialidad de todos los participantes se protegerá.

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Lisa Ortiz-Guzmán, MAEE Candidate
Master of Arts in English Education
Department of English
College of Arts & Sciences
University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez

Research Title: ***El inglés es la clave: Life Histories of First-Generation-College-Student Return Migrants and Their Perceptions of English as Key to College and Professional Success***

Informed Consent Form

- ❖ I have read and discussed the Description of the Research Project provided by the researcher and have clarified doubts related to the study.
- ❖ I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I can refuse to participate or decide to discontinue my participation at any stage of the research without receiving any type of repercussions against me.
- ❖ If deemed necessary, the researcher can terminate my participation in this study at any moment.
- ❖ If during the study, important information were to arise that may affect my decision to continue participating in the research, the researcher will inform me.
- ❖ Any personal information used in this study can be revealed solely by my consent.
- ❖ I will receive a copy of both the Description of the Research Project and of the Informed Consent Form.

- ❖ If at any moment I were to have questions or concerns, I can get in touch with the researcher, who will reassure that all my concerns be clarified. The researcher’s cell phone number is (787) 464-3361 and her email address is lisa.ortiz@upr.edu.
- ❖ If audio and/or videotaping were to be implemented during the research project, I:
 - _____accept being recorded
 - _____do not accept being recorded
 - _____accept being videotaped
 - _____do not accept being videotaped

By signing this consent form, I certify that I have read the necessary documents to understand the parameters of this study and I am willing to voluntarily participate in this research project.

Participant printed name

Participant signature

Researcher signature

Date

Appendix D

Hoja de Consentimiento Informado

Lisa Ortiz-Guzmán, Candidata a Maestría
Maestría en Artes en Educación en Inglés
Departamento de Inglés
Facultad de Artes y Ciencias
Universidad de Puerto Rico en Mayagüez

Research Title: ***El inglés es la clave: Life Histories of First-Generation-College-Student Return Migrants and Their Perceptions of English as Key to College and Professional Success***

Hoja de Consentimiento Informado

- ❖ He leído y discutido la Descripción de la Investigación provista por la investigadora y aclarado dudas con relación al estudio.
- ❖ Entiendo que mi participación en este estudio es voluntaria y puedo negarme a participar o cesar la misma en cualquier etapa de la investigación sin ningún tipo de repercusiones en mi contra.
- ❖ De entenderlo pertinente, la investigadora puede terminar mi participación en este estudio en cualquier momento.
- ❖ Si durante el estudio surgiese información importante que pudiese afectar mi decisión de permanecer en el mismo, la investigadora me lo informará.
- ❖ Cualquier información personal utilizada en este estudio podrá ser divulgada únicamente con mi consentimiento.
- ❖ Recibiré copia tanto del documento Descripción de la Investigación como del documento Hoja de Consentimiento Informado.

- ❖ Si en algún momento me surgiese alguna duda o preocupación puedo comunicarme con la investigadora quien se asegurará de que todas mis dudas sean aclaradas. El número de celular de la investigadora es 787-464-3361 y su dirección electrónica es lisa.ortiz@upr.edu.
- ❖ De llevarse a cabo grabaciones de audio y/o video durante la investigación yo:
 - _____accedo a ser grabado(a) con audio
 - _____no accedo a ser grabado(a) con audio
 - _____accedo a ser grabado(a) con video
 - _____no accedo a ser grabado(a) con video

Al firmar esta hoja de consentimiento certifico que he leído los documentos necesarios para entender los parámetros del estudio y estoy dispuesto(a) a participar en el mismo voluntariamente.

Nombre del participante en letra de molde

Firma del participante

Firma de la investigadora

Fecha

Appendix E

Guiding Questions for Interviews

The guiding questions that follow will be conducted during the interviews with my participants. Due to the nature of qualitative research, and the possible emergence of new information, questions can be modified or changed if these circumstances arise during the research project. I follow Yow (2005) when she explains that an interview aimed at life histories should have enough rapport so that both the interviewer and narrator consider themselves in a conversation. Therefore, the interview protocols I present in this proposed research study are categorized with the objective of answering research questions, and not particularly, a specific key term. Naturally, the order in which questions are asked may change, depending on the contributions of the narrator.

Research question 1: How do FGCS return migrants represent, in the narration of their life histories, English, English competence and their own linguistic practices and experiences in Puerto Rico?

Interview questions:

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born? When?
3. Describe your adaptation process once you moved.
4. Do you consider yourself Puerto Rican? Why? Why not?
5. Did you consider yourself Puerto Rican while you lived in the U.S.? Why? Why not?
6. How would you consider your proficiency level in English? How does that make you feel?

7. How did you learn English? Did you grow up bilingual? Were you aware of it? How did it make you feel?
8. What language did you use at home? In your community? At school? At work? Why?
9. When do you use English in Puerto Rico?
10. How do you feel when using English in Puerto Rico?
11. What did it mean for you to be an English speaker before moving to PR? Did that meaning change once you moved to PR? How so? Were there any situations, relationships and/or experiences that might have triggered that change? (Anecdotes).
12. Was English speaking fomented in your household when you moved to PR? Why or why not? By whom? How did that make you feel? How does it make you feel now?
13. Was English speaking fomented in your school/workplace when you moved to PR? Why or why not? By whom? How did that make you feel? How does it make you feel now?

Research question 2: To what extent does English proficiency play a role in FGCS return migrants' decision to pursue a college degree?

Interview questions:

1. Who or what motivated you to pursue a college degree?
2. Were you encouraged? Why or why not? By who? (How did members of your family respond when learning you would apply to college?)
3. Do other members of your family have college degrees? If so, are they also native speakers of English?

4. How long had you lived in Puerto Rico before entering college? How proficient were you in English/Spanish when you entered college in Puerto Rico? Did you take this into consideration before applying to college?

Research question 3: How do FGCS return migrants characterize their college experiences and the value of a college education for themselves and for their family?

Interview questions:

1. Have you always wanted to go to college?
2. What do you remember about your college application process? When did you do it? Did you have orientation and support? Why or why not? From who?
3. How did you react when you were accepted into college? How did your family react?
4. What was your major in college?
5. How would you describe your overall college experience? Highlights and downfalls?
Memorable anecdotes?
6. What is the importance of a college education today? How important was/is it for you?
7. What influences has your college experience had on you? Please explain.

Research question 4: To what extent might English proficiency influence performance in college for FGCS return migrants?

Interview questions:

1. Did you *feel* that you were proficient in English after you entered college? Why? In what contexts? Did that change in any way throughout your college years? When? Why?

2. What was your major in college? Was your proficiency in English helpful to pursue/complete this degree? Why or why not? Do you recall having advantages over other students because of this? Please explain.
3. Was your proficiency in English helpful to manage other aspects of college life?

Research question 5: To what extent might English proficiency influence upward mobility for FGCS return migrants?

Interview questions:

1. Was knowing English a requirement for your job position?
2. How frequently do you use English in your employment?
3. Have you had opportunities within your job solely because of your English proficiency?
4. In Puerto Rico there is a perception that English is the key to success. What do you think about this? Do you agree? Do you disagree? How is this reflected in your own story?

Appendix F

Flier used to Promote Research Project

Have you lived in the US and in Puerto Rico?

Are you the first in your family to go to college or obtain a college degree?

*We want to hear
your story*

*We want to record
your story*

*We want to share
your story*

THEN
you are an ideal participant for a research project that will be conducted in the near future, as part of a graduate student's thesis for a Master of Arts in English Education. The researcher is also a first generation college student born and raised in the US

*Contact person:
Lisa Ortiz-Guzmán
fgcsreturnmigrants@gmail.com*

For more information:
Email: fgcsreturnmigrants@gmail.com

Appendix G

Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: Please provide the corresponding answer for each premise and/or question.

1. Gender ___F ___M

2. Age range:

Below 25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
over 65

3. Where were you born? ___Puerto Rico ___United States ___ other

4. If you were born in Puerto Rico, please indicate when (the approximate year) you moved to the United States and at what age.
____year
____age

5. If you were born in the United States, please indicate when (the approximate year) you moved to Puerto Rico and at what age.
6. ____year
____age

7. If you were born in Puerto Rico, please indicate where.

8. If you were born in the United States, please indicate where.

9. What is your native (first) language? _____

10. Where do you live at present?

11. Did you finish college?

12. Are you employed at present? ___Yes ___No

13. If you are employed, please mention your occupation.

Appendix H

IRB Approval

**UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO EN MAYAGÜEZ
DECANATO DE ASUNTOS ACADÉMICOS
COMITÉ PARA LA PROTECCIÓN DE LOS SERES HUMANOS EN LA INVESTIGACIÓN
(CPSHI/IRB—00002053)**

5 de mayo de 2011

Lisa Ortíz Guzmán
RR-2 Box 4186
Añasco, PR 00610

Estimado investigador;

El comité revisó su proyecto "El inglés es la clave: Life Histories of First-Generation-College-Student Return Migrants and Their Perceptions of English as Key to College and Professional Success" y, luego de evaluar la documentación sometida, le aprueba el mismo. Recordándole que esta aprobación será por un año, hasta el 05 de mayo de 2012.

De realizar cambios a su investigación, favor notificar al comité sobre los mismos.

Atentamente,


Dra. Dafne Javier
Presidenta Interina
CPSHI

DJ/nmrv